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# Pressures, centralization, economics, technology, and ethics: factors that impact public information officer - journalist relationships

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PRESSURES, CENTRALIZATION, ECONOMICS, TECHNOLOGY, AND ETHICS:  
FACTORS THAT IMPACT  
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER – JOURNALIST RELATIONSHIPS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by  
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December 2012

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated first to my late grandfather, Norman D. Iehl. He instilled in me a love for learning and family. His advice to my mother to seek her education first, which they passed on to me, is a big reason this document exists. Next, I want to dedicate this to my parents, Nancy and Brian McCollough. My education has been supported in every sense of the word and I owe much of it them. My mother is my best friend and mentor in balancing work and life, and I have always been grateful for all of her patience, listening, and effort to fill a devil's advocate role in helping me see the best path to meet my goals. Finally, I dedicate this to my fiancée, Jennifer Songe, whose love and support have been a constant in the best and worst of times over the last 3 years.

*I owe all of you a debt of gratitude, and you should all know you are loved and appreciated with the same commitment and joy you have shown me.*

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A dissertation is considered one of the most challenging things a person can complete because of its characterization as self-directed research and writing. Well, while it is true that much of what a doctoral candidate does is self-directed, this is not entirely true. More accurately, it takes a village of people to help a graduate student complete a dissertation. My experience certainly reflects this fact. Mentors, friends, and colleagues all deserve credit for their sustained support and effort that helped me in finishing this project.

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Song helped me to think about this document as a narrative, which helped me refine my argument within. Dr. Weil helped me to cut through my own intellectual clutter and see tangible relationships in the mountain of transcripts and log entries.

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## **Abstract**

A study of public information officers (PIOs) in three states and the journalists that cover state government finds five primary factors that shape the working relationships between both groups. Institutional pressures on both PIOs and journalists impact the ability of both parties to meet the needs of the other party on a daily basis. High levels of centralization in state government communication limit the ability of PIOs to meet the needs of journalists, fostering journalists' antagonism and a more combative working relationship. The economic decline of journalism is creating a dichotomous situation where PIOs can help journalists manage increasing demands on shrinking deadlines, or they can take advantage of growing limitations on journalists and abuse the relationships. Growing use of social and digital media are providing opportunities to help journalists be more efficient in performing daily tasks, but some journalists perceive of PIOs' use of these tools as a source of competition for public attention. Straightforward, ethical practices by both parties that are grounded in candor help build trust over time and strengthen working relationships. These findings provide the basis for a new model for state government media relations that helps PIOs and journalists negotiate these factors to meet their shared responsibilities in co-creating an enlightened citizenry.

## **Introduction**

State government public information officers (PIOs) and journalists share a unique relationship, which is fundamentally different from that of private sector public relations practitioners and journalists. PIOs fill an established role as public servants that private sector practitioners do not. PIOs must provide information to citizens about the work of their respective state agencies at the request of citizens and the media, while private sector practitioners have the latitude to selectively provide information to the public in representing their clients or organizations.

Journalists who cover state government, specifically, provide primary conduits through which PIOs can communicate to the public on behalf of state agencies. They are also a primary information source for citizens seeking to learn about the practices of their state governments. Together, PIOs and journalists who cover state government share a critical role in co-creating an enlightened citizenry through the body of information about state government that each group provides. This study focuses on the working relationships between state government PIOs and journalists and the characteristics that shape these relationships.

### **What Are PIOs?**

PIOs are the communication coordinators or spokespersons of certain governmental organizations (i.e. city, county, school district, state government, police departments, and fire departments). Much like practitioners in private organizations, PIOs can perform media relations functions, plan and implement communication campaigns, manage internal communications for their government agency, and coordinate and conduct public events (Garnett, 1992; Graber, 1992).

The work of PIOs differs from public relations departments of private organizations in that marketing plays a more limited role (Garnett, 1992; Graber, 1992). The limited marketing role is grounded in legislation passed in 1913 known as the Gillette Amendment, which banned PIO funding for lobbying and limited funding for other public relations practices (Turney, 2009).

The primary responsibility of a PIO is to provide information to the media and public as required by law and according to the standards of the profession. This aspect of their job is conducted through media relations, through direct communication with the public, and by responding to citizen queries for information legally mandated by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (Garnett, 1992; Graber, 1992). Many PIOs are former journalists, bringing unique and relevant experience to the position, which in the three states studied, proved to be a critical consideration in evaluating the nature of the working relationships with journalists. One documented aspect of this working relationship is the power struggle over control of the message that reaches the public; the following section briefly discusses this struggle and its evolution.

### **PIO-Journalist Power Struggle**

Public sector organizations and communicators have long struggled over the message that reaches the public. Government communication and the work of PIOs began with lobbying legislators and interest groups (Turney, 2009), then shifted focus to propaganda work during and after World War I (Bernays, 1928). Walter Lippmann (1922) led the response of journalists in calling for greater scrutiny, objectivity, and detachment in covering government because of the critical role that news media play in informing the public and because of past abuses of the news media and public manipulation by governments through inaccurate information and weak reporting on governments and military actions during World War I.

As the century progressed, PIOs embraced dual roles as information brokers to the public and reputation managers of their organizations. Governmental agencies would provide greater media access for emerging radio and television technologies, but they also controlled access to information. Part of this control was due to journalists' dependence on authoritative figures (Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980; Hallin, 1986; Schudson, 1989). Government agencies during the administrations of Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy were able to control media coverage through leverage of media access and perceived respect for the authority figures of the era (Gitlin, 1980; Hallin, 1986).

For journalism, rising social trends of cultural dissent, coupled with increased deception, stonewalling, and criticism from political authorities in the Presidential administrations of Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon in the 1960s and 1970s, gave rise to watchdog journalism (Gans, 1979; Hallin, 1986; Tuchman, 1978). Watchdog journalism incorporated progressive era muckraking into the political journalism of the time. The efforts of journalists during the Watergate scandal built tremendous public trust in journalism and distrust in politicians and government (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). Journalism came to be perceived as filling a "fourth estate" role in government, overseeing the three branches of government on behalf of a concerned public (Cook, 2005; Hulteng & Nelson, 1971).

Watchdog journalism lost strength in the late 1970s and 1980s, and the practice came to be overused. Watchdog journalism morphed into "gotcha" journalism, and its critics noted that the emphasis on scandal news and combative approaches to reporting were weakening the quality of news (Mindich, 1998; Hallin, 1986). Issue coverage and public discourse on policy were in decline as the focus on episodic events increased in media coverage (Iyengar, 1991).

Watchdog journalism prompted an evolution from PIOs in their strategic approaches to media relations and public relations in general in the 1980s and 1990s. Public relations practitioners were trying to overcome the antagonism that existed between them and journalists, in the wake of post-Watergate skepticism. Also, they sought to overcome the general public perception of their profession and the impact it had on public perceptions of the individuals and organizations they represented.

Emphasis among PIOs and practitioners shifted to relationship building, open and honest communication, and engaging citizens in ethical, two-way communication (Foster, 1984; Garnett, 1992; Graber, 1992; Grunig, 1992). PIOs obtained greater media access and public trust through honesty and by cultivating mutual respect (Garnett, 1992; Graber, 1992). Scholars in public relations began to emphasize strategic identification of publics and message crafting (Grunig, 1997; Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and to focus on building relationships with publics over message crafting and dissemination (Bruning & Ledingham, 1998; Ferguson, 1984). Changes in economics and technology at the beginning of the 21st century have also impacted the practices and power struggle between PIOs and journalists. The following section begins to identify the continued evolution of both professions, given the economic and technological changes.

## **The 21st Century**

The current context is one in flux, and is the concern of this project. Scholars in public relations (Cho, 2006; Howard, 2004; Sallot & Johnson, 2006) provide evidence that the perceived antagonisms of previous generations of public relations practitioners and journalists are in decline due to practical demands on journalists and a revised approach by public relations practitioners to media relations that is grounded in strategic, selective releases and more consideration of individual journalists when making a pitch or responding to media queries.



Shaw and White (2004) suggest that an increase in interdisciplinary education in both public relations and journalism is minimizing the antagonism once held by journalists because they now better understand their counterparts. Bruning and Ledingham (2007) suggest that an emphasis on building and maintaining mutually beneficial working relationships with journalists is resulting in a transition from antagonism to symbiosis.

Scholars critical of media relations and their impact on current journalistic norms and routines have their own perspective on the subject. Economic downturn and corporatization stripped journalism of news staff and the rigor once placed in news gathering and production (McChesney & Nichols, 2010). Foley (2004) notes that downsizing in the newsroom is resulting in a weakened level of scrutiny of information gathered, and even a growing reliance on media releases as direct news content, resulting in the ability of government agencies to manipulate the media to their policy agenda. Technological innovation is a critical consideration, and one that is showing early promise in helping cultivate a productive working relationship that is professional, even when both parties will work at cross-purposes (Shin & Cameron, 2003a, 2003b).

### **Factors Influencing PIO-Journalist Relationships**

This study identifies five central factors that influence the working relationships between PIOs and journalists. The first of these factors is that of institutional pressures on both PIOs and journalists. PIOs experience institutional pressures from within state agencies to improve their reputation through message control, often due to agency staff and administrative ignorance about the role of a PIO, the dangers of manipulation, and the value of maintaining negotiated relationships with journalists. Journalists struggle with managerial, editorial, and pragmatic pressures to maximize output and to maintain specific standards of newsgathering under increasing demands and shrinking deadlines.

The second factor influencing PIO-journalist working relationships is the degree of centralization of communication within specific state governments. State governments concerned with greater message control, consistency among state agencies, and minimizing information leaks will engage in higher levels of centralization. The communication strategy minimizes diversity of perspectives from agency experts and bureaucrats, limiting source perspectives for journalists covering state government. This proves to be a strong source of antagonism for journalists with PIOs, state agencies, and state governments.

The third factor influencing working relationships is the current economic downturn of journalism. In one sense, the increasing demands, shrinking newsrooms, and shorter deadlines are creating a demand for PIOs to help fill gaps for overtaxed journalists in the newsgathering process. In another sense, pressures on PIOs to control the message and to centralize communication create situations in which PIOs may abuse relationships with reporters by capitalizing on their situation to control the information that reaches the public. The potential for abuse generates journalist skepticism and antagonism between both parties. More importantly, it poses a threat to an enlightened citizenry, which should be a professional goal and ethical obligation for both PIOs and journalists.

The fourth factor influencing working relationships is emerging communication technology. Specifically, social and digital media are emerging resources for PIOs to build a direct line to the public that avoids vetting by the news media. It can also provide a reference tool for journalists to expedite newsgathering. Whether technology will ultimately be a tool that aids in building PIO-journalist working relationships or a source of competition for public attention and antagonism remains to be seen, but it is a growing factor of influence.

The final factor of influence on working relationships is the degree of ethical, honest interaction between PIOs and journalists. PIOs who approach their work adhering to the ethical obligation to inform the public and work with journalists with a sense of candor earn positive reputations and become trusted media contacts in time. Likewise, journalists who approach newsgathering with an open, honest perspective and consult the PIOs and agencies they cover earn greater trust from PIOs and agencies which enable greater accessibility to sources and information.

### **Past Scholarly Attention**

Scholars have done some exploration of the factors discussed in this study. Garnett (1992) and Graber (1992) both published a book on federal PIOs in the same year. Turney (2009) later offered a journal article on the historical context of government public relations. These scholars focused largely on the internal challenges and the practical differences between the public and private sector. Their work, however, offers a limited perspective for this dissertation on media relations in the modern context.

Scholars have a long history of studying practices, pressures, and professional values of journalists, and their impact on the quality of news that reaches the public (Fishman, 1990; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). Recent scholarship on the topic chronicles the impact of corporatization of news and the economic downturn of journalism on practices, pressures, and professional values (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney & Nichols, 2010). Also gaining attention is the impact of new communication technologies on newsgathering (Ahmad, 2010; Bivens, 2008; Cushion & Lewis, 2009).

Scholars in public relations literature focusing on the private sector have addressed key elements that are essential to this study. Ledingham & Bruning (1998) have led the field in

studying relationship management between an organization and its publics as the primary focus of good public relations, and have validated this principle in a variety of contexts, including media relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 2007). Grunig (1989, 2009) established the value of strategic identification and segmentation of specific sub-sections of the public that interact with an organization. He also emphasized the importance of crafting messages for each sub-section while monitoring their position on an issue throughout a communication campaign. Scholars have also explored media relationships in the private sector, and found relationships ranging from antagonistic to symbiotic on the basis of practical elements, past experiences, and perceptions held of one another (Aronoff, 1975a, 1975b; Jeffers, 1977; Sallot & Johnson, 2006). Scholars have noted the importance of crafting corporate media relations approaches that attend to the practical needs and limitations of reporters in the current economic climate (Howard, 2004; Sallot & Johnson, 2006).

### **Missing and Outdated Elements**

In the existing research on the subject, several aspects have received minimal or no attention from researchers. Research on PIOs is sorely outdated in general, particularly on the practices of media relations, the state of journalism, the practices of journalists, and technologies used. Garnett (1992) and Graber (1992) both wrote about media relations and communication in an era before web-based and mobile communication, the economic downturn in journalism, the evolution of journalism to multi-platform dissemination, and the impact of these elements on the practice of media relations and the relationships between PIOs and journalists. These elements are essential to understanding how the practice of state government media relations is performed in the modern context. These components will be accounted for in this study.

Also missing is research on state and local governments. In explaining how their findings apply to state or local government, Garnett (1992) and Graber (1992) suggest that practices “trickle down”; therefore, the findings can be broadly applied when examining PIOs at the state and local level. This ignores the potential for differences in state governments to impact PIO-journalist working relationships, which this study also accounts for.

Previous research paid minimal attention to the application of media relations in the work of PIOs. Both Garnett (1992) and Graber (1992) briefly address media queries, media pitching, and the decision-making process of whether or not professionals should go off-the-record with journalists covering their agency. Other than identifying the elements of the historical power struggle, little is offered concerning the practical elements that shape working relationships, which is the focus of this study.

Public relations scholars have also been noticeably quiet on the public sector applications of relationship management theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) and situational theory of publics (Grunig, 2009). They have also to this point avoided journalist-practitioner relationships (Aronoff, 1975a, 1975b; Jeffers, 1977; Sallot & Johnson, 2006) in the public sector. Resource limitations, institutional pressures, and state politics have an impact on the practice of government communication (Turney, 2009) and the ability to apply these theories and principles in media relations. How do PIOs negotiate such limitations? This study attempts to answer this question and provide a public sector perspective on each of these components of public relations research.

This study also incorporates two elements that previous research on the topic has yet to apply in practice. The first element is the examination of both PIOs and journalists that share the same research setting. Previous studies have explored either journalist or practitioner

perspectives, but not both in contrast. This approach permits direct comparison of practices, the manner in which both parties respond to them, and their impact on PIO-journalist working relationships.

The second new contribution is the application of sociology's social network theory (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 1992, 2005) to the study of public relations, journalism, and the practice of media relations. Using the principles of brokerage and closure that define the ability of individuals to build and maintain relationships between networks permits the researcher to identify the influence of the factors mentioned above on the ability of both PIOs and journalists to build working relationships outside of their immediate professional networks.

### **A New Model for State Government Media Relations**

This dissertation proposes the first model (called the STRAPS model) for state government media relations. The model accounts for both PIO and journalist perspectives in daily practices. It also proposes practical approaches in the work of both PIOs and journalists that aid in overcoming institutional pressures and state-level contextual differences. It is informed by public relations theories and journalistic norms and routines that account for state government and public sector challenges that both PIOs and journalists must face. The model also accounts for current technologies (and their continuing evolution), as well as the practical limitations of journalism and state government communication.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review and Research Questions**

The objective of this dissertation is to better define the work relationships between PIOs and journalists. To do this, the study seeks to identify the characteristics that shape PIO-journalist relationships and their current status. The following body of research in public relations, journalism, and sociology focuses on the characteristics that aid in building and maintaining relationships.

### **1.1 The Journalist-Practitioner Relationship**

While this study is unique because of its focus on the working relationships between state government PIOs and journalists, it is not the first to explore media relations. Research on public relations practitioners and journalists in general provides some preliminary indicators on the nature of relationships between PIOs and journalists, as well as the characteristics that shape those relationships. Early scholarship noted that journalists viewed the relationship with public relations practitioners as antagonistic, based on misperceptions about the practice of public relations (Aronoff, 1975a, 1975b). Jeffers (1977) found that journalists perceive that practitioners lack professionalism and ethics. Chief issues cited by journalists for the antagonism is the lack of transparency, withholding information, a lack of ethics, a lack of professionalism, a lack of understanding of news values, and especially a lack of objectivity in providing news content to journalists (Sallot & Johnson, 2006).

Another source of antagonism is journalists' ignorance about the work of practitioners. Kopenhaver, Martinson, and Ryan (1984) found that editors at Florida newspapers viewed public relations much more negatively than public relations practitioners viewed the practice of journalism. Stegall and Sanders (1986) found that public relations faculty could more accurately predict the news values of journalists than could journalists predict the news values of

practitioners and public relations faculty. Habermann, Kopenhaver, and Martinson (1988) found that journalism educators hold more negative perceptions about public relations practitioners than do public relations professors about journalists and their own practice.

Previous negative professional experiences promote these perceptions and the adversarial relationship between journalists and practitioners. Journalists cite previous negative experiences with unethical practitioners and a sense that they are “used” by practitioners (Jeffers, 1975, 1977; Ryan & Martinson, 1988). Conversely, practitioners commonly attribute the antagonism to journalists having an over-inflated sense of importance and a bias on the part of journalists rather than any failures (Jeffers, 1977).

Practitioners acknowledge their role in the antagonistic relationship. Ryan and Martinson (1988) found that practitioners suggest that their inability to ethically police themselves has created the antagonistic environment in which they work with journalists. Ryan and Martinson (1988) also found that practitioners believe that part of the negativity is due to their work being more focused on the client than on the needs of journalists.

Practitioners applying new technologies may be mitigating antagonistic relationships. Shin and Cameron (2003a) found that journalists were receptive to email news releases, home pages, and Web site pressrooms. Journalists rated these tools and the practitioners utilizing them as useful, influential, credible, ethical and professional (Shin & Cameron, 2003a). Shin and Cameron (2003b) found that both journalists and PIOs see the Internet as a potential means of developing a positive, ethical approach to providing information and reporting on the news. They suggest that shrinking newsrooms, increased demand for news content, and reduced editing time may all have a positive impact on the practitioner-journalist relationship.



Strategic approaches by public relations practitioners also positively impact the perceptions that journalists hold. Arpan and Pompper (2003) found that in crisis communication, the use of a highly proactive form of public communication called “stealing thunder” improved perceived practitioner credibility with journalists. Personal relationships, a key aspect of this study, are also proving essential for practitioners to successfully enhancing media relationships (Cho, 2006; Jo & Kim, 2004). Howard (2004) confirms this, but emphasizes the importance of paying attention to the material journalists produce, the deadlines of journalists, and by providing access to the people and materials journalists need.

This study examines the ability of PIOs to build symbiotic relationships with journalists, given the unique context of state government and PIOs’ explicit roles as public servants that must inform the public and their shared responsibility with journalists in co-creating an enlightened citizenry. Understanding the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners provides a preliminary understanding of the nature of media relationships over time and the factors that shape them. Critical to this study is an understanding of the changing dynamics of the relationship in recent literature and the factors that contribute to this shift in a dynamic work environment. Included in this relationship shift are technological advances, strategic approaches, and relationship cultivation. This literature provides essential characteristics to consider in understanding the working relationship between journalists and PIOs. The following section discusses on body of research in public relations that is centrally focused on building and maintaining relationships, a key factor in this study.

## **1.2 Relationship Management Theory**

The focus on work relationships between PIOs and journalists is in keeping with public relations literature of the past 30 years. Scholars including Ferguson (1984) and Grunig (1992)

called for public relations practitioners to emphasize building and maintaining relationships, rather than message craft, dissemination, and control. Relationship Management Theory (RMT) offers a body of research that puts the focus of practitioners squarely on the building and maintenance of relationships between organizations and their publics. RMT scholars posit that practitioners must fill a mediator's role between an organization and its publics in order to most effectively build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships over time (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Practitioners must not only create a sense of organizational concern for each public, but also help the organizations they represent understand each public and how their actions impact them and the relationship they share.

Similarly, PIOs are liaisons between a state agency and their publics. It is critical to develop productive relationships between themselves, the agency, and the publics they interact with for long-term success. If the agency fails to meet the demands of its wide array of constituents, or it fails to communicate how it is meeting the needs of its constituents, the organization is more susceptible to scrutiny and penalties from the legislative bodies that set budgets and policy for the agency, and the governor who appoints agency administrators.

A critical public for PIOs on a daily basis is the news media representatives covering state government. The news media are a body of information conduits where the public regularly obtains their information. A failure to attend to the needs of the media could result in a misrepresentation of facts on agency practices, and future antagonism between the PIO and media reporters.

Researchers commonly offer two interconnected definitions of relationship management that come from different perspectives. Ledingham and Bruning (1998) offer a definition that links relationships and impact: “[An organization-public relationship is] the state which exists

between an organization and its key publics, in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural or political well-being of the other” (p. 62).

Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (2000) offer a transactional perspective with their definition of organization-public relations: “Relationships consist of the transactions that involve the exchange of resources between organizations . . . and lead to mutual benefit, as well as mutual achievement” (p. 91).

Both of these definitions are necessary for PIOs when considering how they interact with publics. Journalists play a critical role in helping PIOs and state agencies get information to the public, and ultimately help shape the reputations of state agencies or state governments with the public. So, PIOs must be conscious of media relationships and the impact of those relationships on their agencies’ reputation over time. One means by which PIOs succeed is through providing access to journalists, satisfying their transactional needs as professionals. Consistent, ethical performance over time is a means of improving the output of journalists, which enhance the reputation of PIOs and their agencies. Thus, identifying the importance of PIOs consistently meeting the transactional needs of journalists may be a strong factor in improving the work relationships between PIOs and journalists.

The growing body of RMT literature demonstrates that its application is effective across diverse contexts pertinent to this study. RMT principles have proven effective in aiding public relations practitioners in crisis (Coombs, 2000), in preemptive work to aid issue management (Bridges and Nelson, 2000), conflict resolution (Huang, 2001), and community relations (Bruning, Langenhop, & Green, 2004).

RMT also has its applications in media relations, the strategic practice in public relations at the heart of this dissertation. Ledingham and Bruning (2007) make note of the “antagonistic”

relationships between practitioners and journalists (Aronoff, 1975a, 1975b). Ultimately, delivering on promises, being honest and forthcoming, and working with the needs of journalists in mind all help improve working relationships and can help to change the culture of antagonism once so prevalent in media relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 2007). RMT provides a means of identifying how PIOs fill mediators' roles between state agencies and publics, including the media. A key aspect in building and maintaining relationships is being attentive to each public proactively and adapting to their needs as they evolve over time. With this in mind, situational theory for the accommodation of publics is incorporated as part of this study.

### **1.3 Situational Theory of Publics**

Situational theory (Grunig, 1989, 2009) states that public relations practitioners should proactively identify the characteristics of each of the publics that interact with their organizations. Strategic segmenting of publics in message crafting aids relationship building for practitioners by enabling them to more adaptively attend to the needs of specific publics, and actively work to help resolve problems to the benefit of both organizations and publics (Grunig, 2009). Situational theory provides a method by which practitioners can work to better build and maintain relationships that meet the needs of publics an organization interacts with.

Grunig (1966, 1976) developed this theoretical perspective to account for how public relations practitioners may apply a strategic approach to communication with specific publics. It not only accounts for how to craft the messages to activate important publics, but also how messages can activate latent publics that may prove challenging to organizations, and how messages can deactivate publics in opposition to an organization's strategic position. The critical components included in this area of analysis are individuals' ability to recognize problems (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), recognition of the psychological and physical constraints on their ability

to act (Witte & Allen, 2000), their level of personal involvement (Devlin, 1989; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Pavlik, 1988), their tendency to be active information seekers (Grunig, 1989) and passive information processors (Grunig, 1989).

In the process of cultivating situational theory, Grunig (1989) laid the ground work for a continuum on which to place publics in reference to a given issue or problem that an organization and its publics share. The groups are segmented as nonpublics, latent publics, aware publics, and active publics. The greater the knowledge, the greater the impact of problems, and the lower the sense of perceived constraint, the more likely a person will move from being part of a nonpublic to a member of an active public on a given issue and problem.

A person's and public's position is not static through the life of a campaign or issue. More knowledge can be acquired, the sense of constraint can shift, and the dynamic shifts within a given context can also change the level of impact on individuals within a group. In this sense, situational theory requires a consistent evaluation and re-evaluation throughout the life of a campaign or agenda in order to gauge campaign effectiveness, as well as to maintain an accurate representation of publics and their status in the continuum to ensure that proper techniques are being employed in communicating with each group (Grunig, 1997, 2009).

By proactively identifying each public and its problems, public relations practitioners can better craft communication, but also better fill the mediator's role proposed by RMT scholars (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) through active identification of problems each public has and collaboratively solving problems, while adapting approaches over time to meet the needs of each public as they change. Utilizing this approach ultimately aids practitioners in reaching the mutually beneficial outcomes espoused by RMT and public relations in general (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

Situational theory offers a means of analyzing the strategic segmenting of publics, crafting messages, and determining PIOs' approach to relationship management with different segments of the public when engaging in communication. How these principles are applied in conjunction with pragmatic and institutional factors when interacting with journalists will be instructive in understanding how public sector communication compares to the private sector.

This study explores the extent to which PIOs are utilizing the proactive, dynamic segmentation posited by situational theory (Grunig, 2009) with one public that state agencies interact with: the media. Given the central focus of this study on the relationships between PIOs and journalists, a key component is to identify critical characteristics that influence the specific relationships between PIOs and journalists. Thus, PIOs must understand the perspective and needs of the journalists covering their state agencies (Howard, 2004; Ledingham & Bruning, 2007; Sallot & Johnson, 2006). The next section discusses research on journalistic norms and routines, a field of study that addresses the specific practices and values of journalists in the contemporary context.

#### **1.4 Journalistic Norms and Routines**

Journalistic norms and routines are the values and routines that define professionalism among journalists (Fishman, 1990; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). Scholarship on the topic has identified each of these factors, and the impact it has on the work of journalists in the information they provide to the public. An important consideration along with professional values and practices are the pressures that influence professional values and practices over time. The following section identifies the key values, practices, and pressures that shape journalism. It also briefly discusses how the profession has evolved with its recent economic downturn.

There are several central professional values and practices at the core of journalism. Objectivity is a belief in professional detachment from the individuals and organizations reporters cover in an effort to enhance credibility. Detachment is a means of practicing objectivity that permits journalists to enhance credibility with their readers by minimizing perceived biases (Mindich, 1998).

Journalists also make use of other practices to enhance credibility. Verification of facts with multiple sources serves to ensure accuracy in coverage, enhances credibility, and avoids any potential damage to reputation (Gans, 1979). In an effort to enhance credibility, journalists also focus on sourcing experts or authority figures that carry more perceived credibility with the public (Schiller, 1981).

Newsworthiness is the value system by which journalists determine the relative appeal of news stories to their readers or audience and can prioritize newsgathering attention on the basis of value judgments (Gans, 1979). This is critical when considering the glut of information and limited daily schedule journalists work within. Journalists make use of other tools to help make newsgathering more efficient. Delegation of reporting responsibility and prioritization of resources and attention are also a critical part of newsgathering. News typifications are a means of economizing newsgathering and delegating resources in news coverage, as journalists try to predict the newsworthiness and the timeliness of news stories (Tuchman, 1978). Another means of economizing time and effort is the use of a beat structure by journalists to centralize resources around locations where the bulk of newsworthy stories emerge in a given topic area (Tuchman, 1972, 1973, 1978).

The watchdog role, or journalism as a fourth estate (Cook, 2005; Hulteng & Nelson, 1971), is a perceived role of journalists in fulfilling a public service by watching over the

practices of government and informing the public of the deeds and misdeeds of the government that is supposed to represent public interests (Gans, 1979). In an effort to maintain a watchdog role and to enhance objectivity, journalists approach news coverage with a heightened sense of skepticism and critical examination of information provided by government organizations and officials. This specific value is critical to the group of journalists evaluated in this study, who are covering the practices of state government on behalf of its citizens.

Competition is the belief that the best storytelling and coverage comes from highly competitive newsgathering within the newsroom and on the beat (Gans, 1979). These professionals in part defined good journalism throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and remain a point of emphasis among veteran journalists in the 21st century (Bivens, 2008). Competition was once defined by multiple news outlets within the same region competing for the best stories each day. As economic downturn and corporatization of journalism has grown, competition within regions have evolved from newspaper against newspaper and television station against television station to cross-medium competitions between television, print, and Web-based news organizations (Ahmad, 2010; Singer, 2010).

Also critical in journalistic norms and routines is the impact of various forms of pressure on journalists in the newsgathering process. Gans (1979) made note of these pressures and their impact on the practices and professional values of journalists. The economics of journalism have always been a source of pressure on newsgathering, but only in economic decline came to exert powerful forms of indirect pressure on reporters through news management and direct pressure on reporters' newsgathering (Bagdikian, 2004; Entman, 2010; Hamilton, 2004; McChesney, 1999; McChesney & Nichols, 2010; Picard, 2008; Singer, 2005). Managerial pressure, which was once seen as a potential threat to newsgathering that had yet to exert the kind of pressure it



was capable of (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978), now exerts direct and indirect forms of pressure on journalists because of the economic decline of journalism (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney & Nichols, 2010). Political pressure on journalists or source pressure on journalists has the potential to force journalists to soften coverage rather than risk ostracism from key sources that enhance their story's credibility (Gans, 1979; Hallin, 1986). Newsroom pressures represented both direct and indirect forms of pressure from editors and other reporters that often contributed to potential groupthink, competition for greater prestige, and a lack of diversity in newsrooms that can homogenize news coverage (Berkowitz, 1997a; Breed, 1955; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). Pragmatic pressures, including resource limitations, increasing demand, and reliance on specific elements all represent factors that impact the ability of journalists to effectively cover news stories (Ahmad, 2010; Bivens, 2008; Cushion & Lewis, 2009; Gans, 1979; Singer, 2010).

The original focus of research on journalistic norms and routines was on the impact of professional values, practices, and pressures on the quality of news coverage that reached the public. Findings suggested that the long-maintained practices, values, and pressures all worked to maintain a status quo in news coverage and reinforce long-held beliefs by reaffirming old themes, prioritizing the long-held perspectives over alternative points of view, and alienating alternative sources of information that did not strictly meet societal or professional standards of credibility or authority on a news topic (Hallin, 1986; Mindich, 1998; Tuchman, 1978).

Recent focus of the literature concerning norms and routines is on the impact of economic downturn, new technologies, and changing news models on norms and routines and the role of journalists in informing the public. Scholars have identified several factors that contribute to the current decline in journalism's role in informing the public. News models continue to evolve, and the forms of direct pressure on journalists working to fill more content

(Cushion & Lewis, 2009; McChesney & Nichols, 2010), across multiple channels (Ahmad, 2010; Bivens, 2008; Singer, 2005; 2010), under faster deadlines (Ahmad, 2010; Bivens, 2008; Robinson, 2010) merit further examination. Singer (2005) noted an increasing presence of the sales department in newsrooms, which contradicts the once established barrier between news reporters and sales representatives for news organizations (Gans, 1979). It was long held that a strong sales room presence weakens the objectivity and credibility of a newsroom. As the profits in journalism continue to decline, a strong sales and marketing presence in news decisions grows more prevalent (McChesney & Nichols, 2010). The negative impact of the sales department is also impacting the watchdog role, as scholars are finding a shift in focus away from intense scrutiny of government (Pointdexter, Heider, and McCombs, 2006).

Media corporatization and conglomeration, coupled with economic decline, weakens news coverage. Private companies and corporations are able to exert a much more powerful, direct pressure on news organizations that they now own who threaten to embarrass the corporation or individuals and organizations with ties to the corporate ownership (Bagdikian, 2004). Current literature still suggests a dependence on authorities, as well as an avoidance of presenting alternative perspectives or criticism of certain political figures with ties to the parent corporations of the news entity (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 1999; McChesney & Nichols, 2010). McChesney and Nichols (2010) also suggest the grim potential for corporations to simply shut down news organizations that are working counter to corporate interests, specifically in the realm of journalists' watchdog role (Pinto, 2008, 2009).

Technology is also having a strong impact on the work of journalists on a daily basis. The emergence of a 24-hour news cycle in the 1980s and 1990s and the shift to a perpetual breaking news format on the networks have erased many of the old news rhythms (Cushion & Lewis,

2009). The shrinking news cycle exerts direct pressure in the form of resource limitations and time constraints, as less time is available to produce more content across multiple conduits (Ahmad, 2010; Bivens, 2008; Robinson, 2010; Singer, 2005, 2010; Trammell, 2004). Social and digital media present new sourcing and dissemination opportunities that operate asynchronously from a typical news cycle (Ahmad, 2010; Bivens, 2008). While some bloggers remain relatively dubious in their practice, Singer (2005, 2010) found that political bloggers are striving for credibility by adopting traditional norms and routines. Web content dissemination is altering rhythm and dissemination. Web content, however, is often a narrower form of the original content published in mainstream media, or is simply the emptying of the reporter's notebook (Trammell, 2004). While technology is opening new avenues for dissemination and sourcing, it is also contributing to the same pressures and fluctuation that is inhibiting reporting. Robinson (2010) found that convergence journalists are less concerned about verification and rigor than getting the story out first.

Each of these practical limitations and pressures come together to pose a serious threat to the ability of journalists to meet their responsibilities in informing the public and maintaining a watchdog presence over state governments to ensure accountability from agencies and elected officials in their practices. Examining journalistic norms and routines provides a strong means by which to evaluate the current practices of journalists who cover state government to determine if they are fulfilling their fourth estate responsibilities in filling a watchdog role.

Another purpose for including journalistic norms and routines in this study is because of the work of public relations scholars within the current climate who have identified the impact of applying these values and practices on building productive media relationships. Public relations practitioners who attend to the practices, values, and pressures of journalists tend to have

stronger relationships with journalists. Howard (2004) found that practitioners who attend to norms and routines when crafting media pitches and releases are more successful in getting their message to the public through the media. She asserts that given the current economic challenges journalists are facing, the better practitioners attend to norms and routines of specific journalists and news organizations, the more directly their message is received without vetting on the part of over-taxed journalists.

This perspective of collaboration is tempered by the potential for abuse. Journalism scholars are careful to note that there are situations in which PIOs use norms and routines to manipulate journalists covering government. Foley (2004) cautions that the application of norms and routines enabled British government public relations flaks to manipulate the British press. Franklin (2004) explains that applying norms and routines is enabling PIOs to disseminate their message directly through the news media in journalism's current economic climate. He explains that journalists lack the time and manpower to vet information at the level they once did.

Ledingham and Bruning (2007) extended the principles of relationship management theory (RMT) to the context of media relations between public relations practitioners and journalists in an effort to overcome traditionally "antagonistic" relationships (Jeffers, 1977). They found that much as practitioners must identify the perspective and problems of each public in order to find mutually beneficial outcomes between their organization and each public, the most effective practitioners in media relations are successful when they fill a mediator's role between their organizations and journalists, building an understanding of the values, practices, and pressures on journalists within their organizations. Building a mutual understanding between an organization and journalists helps not only facilitate media responsiveness to reporters, but will ultimately enhance the tone of coverage about the organization by working to incorporate

the agency's perspective into the news coverage and by enhancing their accountability to the media.

With the perspective of public relations scholars in mind, the second purpose for including journalistic norms and routines in this study is to enable the researcher to examine if PIOs, like private practitioners, are attending to journalistic norms and routines, and the impact the application of norms and routines by PIOs has on the working relationship with journalists. Is it proving useful in helping them meet their professional responsibilities in informing the public and watching over government practices? Are PIOs instead using this knowledge and these practices to manipulate journalists to satisfy their own needs, rather than fulfilling their own ethical obligations to inform the public in an open, ethical manner? Answering these questions will better establish what impact journalistic norms and routines are having on working relationships between PIOs and journalists.

## **1.5 Social Network Theory**

Examining core public relations theories and research, as well as research on journalistic norms and routines, serves to set a baseline for exploring the current practices of PIOs and journalists covering state government. Social network theory, in contrast, provides a truly unique approach to exploring media relations previously unused in public relations or journalism literature. It offers a means of identifying the larger picture of how practices, institutional pressures, values, and contextual factors impact the ability of PIOs and journalists to build and maintain working relationships.

A social network is a social structure made up of individuals (or organizations) called "nodes," which are tied (connected) by one or more specific types of interdependency, such as friendship, kinship, common interest, financial exchange, dislike, sexual relationships, or

relationships of beliefs, knowledge or prestige (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, and LaBianca (2009) stated that a social network is a map of specified ties between the nodes being studied. The nodes to which an individual is connected are the social contacts of that individual. Social networks have been used to study the characteristics of individuals (nodes) within a network on the basis of their position and the connections they possess, the flow of resources through networks, and the characteristics that define the nature of networks.

One important component that defines the nature of a network is its density, or the strength of the ties within the network (Burt, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1983). In closed networks, people are strongly interconnected, share very similar social circles, enjoy strong social support, and share very strong understandings of the culture, values systems, and ideas and behaviors that are normative within a network (Burt, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1983). Because of reinforcement and dense connections, closed networks also have the benefit of greatly slowing the decay of relationships (Burt, 2005). Strong ties offer the benefit of providing greater social support through solidarity.

Strong networks, however, can be problematic in terms of adaptability to new ideas and behavior (Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1983). Densely connected networks possess a high level of closure, or forces of reinforcement that help reify the accepted forms of behavior, ideas, and values within a network. If the behavior and values of a specific individual within a network do not fit within the value structures and the conduct of other members in the network, the forces of closure within that network will enforce conformity (Burt, 2005). Closure is a force that drives variation out of closed networks, forcing everyone to behave in redundant, socially accepted ways. This makes densely connected networks less receptive to innovation.

Thus, weak ties, unlike strong ties, demonstrate competitive benefits in social networks (Burt, 1992, 2000, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1983). Granovetter (1973) found that less densely connected networks possessing weak ties have a distinct advantage because of a greater number of connections with informal acquaintances than in dense networks. There is greater acceptance of external information and ideas because of these informal acquaintances. Densely connected networks do not have the advantage because of the perceived need to maintain the status quo through closure. Granovetter (1973, 1974) asserted that weak ties are less likely to be involved within social networks than strong ties. He argues that the only thing that can connect two social networks with strong ties is a weak tie: “. . . these clumps / [strong ties networks] would not, in fact, be connected to one another at all were it not for the existence of weak ties. (Granovetter, 1973 pp. 1363; 1983 pp. 202). Another interesting observation that Granovetter makes in his work is that the increasing specialization of individuals creates the necessity for weak ties, as all the other specialist information and knowledge is present in large social networks consisting predominantly of weak ties. (Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1983). The strength of weak ties is akin to the potential benefits available to PIOs and journalists in gaining access to each other’s communities. For PIOs, there is potentially a means of connecting with the public through the media in a beneficial manner. For journalists, access to resources and the principals in an agency are a means of gaining information that other journalists may not be privy to.

Burt (1992, 2000, 2005) used the concept of weak ties to examine individuals who bridge the gaps between two social networks. Burt found that those capable of bridging the gaps, or structural holes, tend to benefit more than others within a network in terms of obtaining greater opportunities, information, and access. People who are bridges possess greater vision of what is

taking place both inside and outside of a network. The ability to build a bridge between two networks across a structural hole is dictated by the ability to broker a relationship.

Burt (1992, 2000, 2005) also defined several components critical in the brokerage process. Brokerages create value in networks by exposing people to variation in information or resource flow. In essence, Burt (2005) offered a different way to discuss the process of building weak ties than Granovetter (1973). In order to broker a relationship, an individual must be able to earn the trust of another with which they hope to form a bond. Trust is cultivated over the passage of time, as a byproduct of the impact of closure reducing the uncertainty that exists between members (Burt, 2005).

Trust is reinforced through reliable, inexpensive sources of warning from third parties that help guard against abusive parties (Burt, 2005). An example of warning from third parties is bandwidth—the presence of redundant, third party resources to speak on the actions of one’s counterparts (Burt, 2005). They often take the form of gossip channels, which help build knowledge about a counterpart on the basis of personal experience on the part of the third party, called echoes (Burt, 2005). Burt (1992, 2000, 2005) also noted that with third parties, closure presents a contradiction to the negative impact it can have in general on a network’s ability to form bonds with other networks. Closure helps build a reputation for a broker within a new network. In the standard situation, the increased information flow permits a network’s members to detect and punish negative behavior, facilitating trust (Burt, 1992, 2005). If a broker is successful, however, he or she will be able to develop positive contact with these third parties throughout the process, permitting the third parties to provide positive reports to the targeted point of contact, facilitating the desired bridge, or weak tie (Burt, 1992, 2000, 2005). This is the process of building reputation in a new network. The echoes caused by bandwidth that serve as a



source of information can be positively influenced through positive initial impressions, making it far more critical to uphold reputation in the initial stages of brokerage (Burt, 1992, 2005).

An important aspect of building relationships is the development of good reputation, which is cultivated at the same time that greater knowledge and trust develop between two individuals (Burt, 2005; Burt & Knez, 1995). Scholars have suggested that trust is created through repeated interaction over time (Blau, 1974; Homans, 1961). As long as one meets expectations in terms of the behavior that the other person predicts, the reputation will grow more positive (Burt, 2005; Burt & Knez, 1995). Reputation is built or eroded on the basis of how well the behavior coincides or contradicts previous expectations (Burt, 2005; Burt & Knez, 1995). Burt also noted that building trust in brokerage is problematic (Burt, 2000, 2005). Relationships rarely exist in isolation; they are influenced by third parties acting on the two parties at the same time. Finally, there is the potential for abuse and dominance of a relationship by one party through deception and ill-conceived reinforcement of the relationship.

Trust, in this sense, is both a strength and weakness of the brokerage process. Burt and Knez (2005) stated that people must trust someone when they commit to a relationship before they know how the other person will behave. The social capital formed in bridging structural holes depends on trust in as much as the value created by brokers involves new, previously disconnected ideas. The issue of trust is moot if brokers confine themselves to trusted contacts, but that would limit brokerage to long-standing networks, leaving untapped the bulk of value that can be gained through brokerage because of the redundancy of the relationship (Burt & Knez, 1995). They also note that by the same process, new individuals who bring new ideas and practices to a network are also forced either to conform and join or not join the network at all.

These forces of closure are problematic for bridges at high levels because they inhibit bridges' ability to connect with a new network.

Closure, however, is needed in some form as a broker builds bonds with a new network (Burt, 2005). Around the two points connecting networks, some closure will be present, as the third parties will be connected with the broker and point of contact (Burt, 2005). Bridging a structural hole will create value within a social network, but delivering the value requires some closure of a cohesive team around the bridge (Burt, 2005). In the case of bridging, closure is valuable when it spans a structural hole (Burt, 2005). Closure lowers the risk of trust. Burt (2005) states that greater network closure means bridges face greater risk of punishment for deviation in tasks. Full integration of the two networks can also occur, eliminating the competitive advantage available to bridges within a network. So, in a sense, a broker will need the ability to strike a balance between total network closure, and a lack of closure (Burt, 2005).

This balance is called structural autonomy (Burt, 2005). It presents high returns on investment when closure works with brokerage, yet it can be challenging when brokerage and closure work at cross purposes (Burt, 2005). Structural autonomy consists of people strongly connected to one another, with extensive bridge relations around the connection itself. Strong reputation mechanisms align people inside of the group around the bridge (Burt, 2005).

Applying the principles of social network theory, this dissertation explores the professional values, practices, and institutional pressures that act either as forces of closure that work against PIOs and journalists building relationships or as a means for PIOs and journalists to broker relationships that are mutually beneficial. By identifying the elements that work to help or inhibit working relationships between PIOs and journalists, social network theory provides a new means for both practitioners and journalists to understand how their values, practices, and

environment impact the work relations and what can be done to negotiate the inherent challenges that each creates.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

On the basis of the literature on the journalist-practitioner relationship (Aronoff, 1975a, 1975b; Sallot & Johnson, 2006), the central research questions of this study are posed:

RQ1: What is the current nature of working relationships between PIOs and journalists?

RQ1a: What impact do specific characteristics have on PIO-journalist relationships?

In order to better understand how the practices of PIOs shape their working relationship with journalists, the following research question and sub-questions are posed:

RQ2: What strategic approaches of PIOs influence their working relationship with journalists?

Thinking about how the norms and routines of journalists (Fishman, 1990; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978) play a role in shaping the working relationship with PIOs (Aronoff, 1975a, 1975b; Foley, 2004; Franklin, 2004; Howard, 2004), the following research question and sub-questions are posed:

RQ3: How do journalistic norms and routines influence the PIO-journalist relationship?

Using social network theory and the strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1983), as well as the relevant literature on brokerage, closure, and bridging (Burt, 1992, 2000, 2005; Burt & Knez, 1995), the following research questions are posed:

RQ4a: What are the forces of brokerage between the social networks of PIOs and journalists?

RQ4b: What are the forces of closure between the social networks of PIOs and journalists?

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

The researcher utilized a case study analysis employing qualitative research methods. The qualitative methods employed were semi-structured, qualitative interviews and neutral observation of PIOs in their workplace (Bernard, 2002a, 2002b; Yin, 2009). The choice to employ qualitative methods was based on previous experience with survey respondents which suggested that a survey instrument might be helpful in gaining a cursory knowledge of the relationship between both PIOs and journalists as groups. However, deeper analysis of the specific characteristics of both parties was necessary to understand the individual professional approaches, contextual differences, and challenges that both professions are currently facing that can shape the individual relationships between PIOs and journalists that cover their organization. While qualitative research sacrifices the ability to claim generalizability of findings across a wider population that a broader survey in both professions might provide, it permits analysis of subtle details of a wide variety of variables among a few cases, as well as permitting for additional exploration of individual responses or concepts offered by respondents that a web-based, phone, or mail survey might not permit (Campbell, 1975; Yin, 2009).

Qualitative researchers utilize a variety of methodologies that permit them to collect and analyze their information in ways that identify subtler meanings and nuances than are possible with quantitative approaches (Roulston, 2010). Among the most widely used methodologies in qualitative research are case studies, long interviews, and observation. Each method employed can be used independently, but most qualitative research projects use combinations of these techniques because each offers a different perspective on data gathered (Roulston, 2010). In this case, an overarching case study methodology is employed that includes qualitative interviewing

as the primary research tool, and makes use of supplemental neutral observation of PIOs in their work environment as a cross-check on the interview data (Yin, 2009).

## **2.1 Case Study Analysis**

Case study analysis provided the ability to analyze the perspectives of a small group of cases while accounting for a broad number of variables (Campbell, 1975; Yin, 2009). As Campbell (1975) noted, the case study approach provides a means of analyzing situations where statistical analyses are impossible because of the large number of variables and lack of depth in cases to analyze. This perspective is fitting, given the narrow scope of states and research subjects examined in this study.

Data collected from interviews of active PIOs, former PIOs, active journalists, and data collected from neutral observation at multiple PIO offices were analyzed to develop a better picture of working relationships and the factors that build or inhibit them.

## **2.2 Sample**

The sample included current state agency PIOs, former state agency PIOs, current state-level political journalists, and former state-level political journalists. Former PIOs and former journalists were included because of high turnover rates common among PIOs (Garnett, 1992; Graber, 1992) and shrinking newsrooms prevalent in mainstream media (McChesney & Nichols, 2010). Various journalists working in print, radio, and television media were included because of the diversity of each of their professions, and the potential differences that these variances may create in the relationship with PIOs.

Nine interviews with current and former PIOs in each of three states resulted in 27 total interviews. Nine to 10 interviews with current and former journalists in each of the three states

resulted in 27 total interviews. In total, 54 interviews comprised the data pool for analysis. The researcher conducted an initial archival search of state agencies in each of the three states to find a pool of PIOs with which to request an interview. PIOs at each state agency were contacted via e-mail and follow-up call with a request for an interview and an inquiry about the possibility of a research visit.

In an effort to expand the pool of respondents after the initial sweep, the researcher also applied snowball sampling (Roulston, 2010) to the list of PIOs contacted. After the initial contact with current state PIOs, the researcher asked each PIO about any current or former PIOs that they would recommend including in the study.

In the case of journalists, a similar approach to selection was employed. An archival search of state media for journalists that cover state government was used to identify a pool of journalists in print, television, and radio news to contact about the possibility of interview. In order to expand the pool to account for a broad spectrum of perspective, the researcher utilized snowball sampling (Roulston, 2010) with journalists as well; inquiring about any current or former colleagues they believed would be worth including in the study. This permitted the researcher to not only speak with current journalists, but to also connect with veteran journalists who recently left the profession, who have a strong contextual knowledge of the environment, and who can speak to the evolution of news gathering in the state government context.

The three states selected for analysis were Iowa, Louisiana, and (the Commonwealth of) Virginia. The three locations were selected for their diversity in culture, population, and geographic placement, and the added benefit of easy access to housing and travel resources in each state. This selection process allowed for a wide variance in state social and political perspectives, as well as a great variance in the complexity and type of agencies contacted for

observation and interview. The consideration of travel expenses and housing availability stemmed from the researcher's limited funding available for the project.

### **2.3 Semi-Structured Interviewing**

Semi-structured qualitative interviewing was used to collect data on the perspective and work processes of current and former PIOs and journalists. The choice of interviewing is grounded in a desire to elicit greater depth in data through a conversational approach (Roulston, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Semi-structured interviewing offers flexibility in conversation that will often cover the subjects of the interview prompts out of the order of questions listed in the prompt (Roulston, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Face-to-face interviewing was employed whenever possible. This allowed for collection of verbal and visual data about interviewees' experiences and perceptions, enhancing the depth of analysis (Roulston, 2010, Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The researcher conducted telephonic and e-mail interviews when scheduling demands and restricted access did not allow for face-to-face interviewing. Telephonic interviews made use of the same protocols used in the face-to-face interviews of PIOs and journalists, but did not allow the researcher to account for data like physical reaction and facial expression. Much like face-to-face interviews, the telephonic interviews were also semi-structured, and still permitted a conversational approach with each respondent. In the telephonic interview, the conversation was also recorded, and the respondents were notified in advance of the interview so they were aware and comfortable with the arrangement.

Email was used in only four situations with journalists who could not schedule an hour for a phone or face-to-face interview due to demands of work schedules. The protocol in this case was consolidated to singular questions, and followed a straightforward structure that the

respondents could reply to at their convenience. Email communication and recorded phone conversations were utilized for follow-up questions when the researcher needed clarification or elaboration on specific answers. The interviews ranged in length from 35 minutes to 2 hours and 15 minutes, depending on the scope of conversation and the schedule of the research subject.

The interview protocols for current and former practitioners were grounded in relationship management theory (Bruning & Ledingham, 1998, 2007), situational theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), government communication (Garnett, 1992; Graber, 1992), social network theory (Burt, 1992, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1983). The researcher also inquired about how the interviewee's organization approaches contextual differences in crisis (Coombs, 2000), issue management (Bridges & Nelson, 2000), and community relations (Bruning, Langenhop, & Green, 2004) scenarios to build an understanding of how these situations might impact PIO practices (See Appendix A).

In the case of interview protocols for current and former journalists, the questions were grounded in journalistic norms and routines (Ahmad, 2010; Berkowitz, 1997a; Bivens, 2008; Gans, 1979; Robinson, 2010; Tuchman, 1978), the journalist-practitioner relationship (Aronoff, 1975a, 1975b), social network theory (Burt, 1992, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1983). As in the case of practitioners, the researcher inquired about contextual differences and their potential impact on norms and routines (See Appendix B).

Audio recording of face-to-face and telephonic interviews facilitated interviewer attention to the respondent in the interview setting and for recall later in transcription (Roulston, 2010). The researcher also took notes on his laptop computer about respondent reactions, key comments, and central themes within the interview for consideration in later documentation and analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This proved feasible due to the relative comfort of respondents



with audio recorders and lab top computers in daily work, and facilitated recollection for long-form memo writing on the interview after each session.

In addition to recording and note-taking, the researcher employed a reflective memo to facilitate recollection in transcription and organization of thoughts in analysis, and as a means to refine and improve the interview process, by identifying and eliminating potential sources of bias throughout the process (Roulston, 2010). Finally, the researcher employed the assistance of a professional transcriptionist to transcribe the bulk of interview recordings for data organization. The choice to bring an independent transcriber into the process was a matter of expediency.

## **2.4 Neutral Observation**

The researcher employed neutral observation of PIOs in their places of work as a cross-check on interview data. The neutral observer approach maintains objectivity and is more feasible under the time constraints of the study (Bernard, 2002b). Given the practical limitations of the research in working to finish the project, participant observation rather than a traditional ethnography permitted the researcher to collect data pertaining to the given environment in a smaller snapshot than a formal, active participation within the research environment over an extended period of time. The researcher visited a total of 10 sites, ranging from one to five days of observation at each, totaling 34 days of observation.

The stated rationale of PIOs for limiting the researcher's presence included concerns about confidentiality, concerns about agency principals being worried about researcher presence, and scheduling limitations of the calendar. In cases of observational limitation, the researcher supplemented the observational log with additional data in the form of conversations with subordinate staff members and supplemental interview questions. The supplemental

conversations and interview questions were either recorded in the daily data logs, or recorded as part of the formal interview, and logged with the other data into the data pool.

While ethnography research would suggest that long-term observation is necessary for a depth of perspective (Bernard, 2002b), the neutral observation served as a means of verifying the approach espoused by PIOs in interviews, a way to sharpen the research prompt to account for emerging questions the researcher had in regards to specific approaches of the PIO, and to incrementally identify emerging practices or trends unaccounted for in the existing body of literature (Garnett, 1992; Graber, 1992) or in the preliminary planning for the study.

Data collection for the neutral observation consisted of multiple forms of memo writing. The first were on-site, short-form memos in pocket-sized notebooks including central themes, critical observances of daily processes of PIOs, and noteworthy situations collected at convenient periods to avoid contaminating the data by interfering with the typical practices of PIOs. Breaks from observation (restroom, lunch, etc.) served as a means of recording data collected without influencing the daily practices of PIOs and their staffs. The notes from the short-form memos served as cognitive prompts to jog the researcher's memory, which facilitated the long-form memos on data at the end of each day of observation. The observation memos were logged in to the data pool for coding and analysis.

In addition to short-form memo writing, the researcher kept three distinct memos on a daily basis that were incorporated into the data pool for analysis. The first memo pertained to daily observations of PIO practices, PIO interactions with other individuals (including reporters), and current events witnessed by the researcher in the field relating to the work of the PIO being researched. The second memo included the researcher's thoughts on the overall analysis and interpretation of the data in the long-term, serving as a means of organizing thoughts and

tracking emerging themes in the data of note for the overall project. The final memo pertained to the researchers' self-reflections on the day's interactions and accounted for any problematic behavior or potential biases being introduced by the researcher into the research setting. The self-reflection memo served as a means of overcoming potential biases on a daily basis, as well as a means of accounting for the impact of biases on the data collected (Bernard, 2002a).

At the end of each week of observation, as well as in unique, emerging circumstances, the researcher wrote intermediate memos capturing key themes, researcher thoughts, and interconnections between concepts. These memos aided the researcher in connecting critical themes and concepts, in clarifying the perspective gained in observation, and identifying any emerging ideas that needed to be integrated into the body of analysis. These intermediate analysis memos were also logged in the data pool for coding and analysis with each of the daily memos and interview prompts.

## **2.5 Data Analysis**

The researcher employed a hybridization of Berkowitz's (1997b) approach to qualitative data analysis, facilitated with NVivo 9 qualitative analysis software. Using Nvivo, the researcher loaded the pool of data into the software and performed the coding process using Berkowitz's (1997b) approach to qualitative data analysis, each piece data file was read twice carefully, audio recordings were played while reading through each of the transcripts, and a broad initial coding of emergent themes was performed. NVivo expedites the process by permitting consolidation of large bodies of diverse text-rich research data into one central location where it also allows the researcher to more efficiently classify, sort and arrange information; examine relationships within the data; and combine analysis with linking, shaping, searching, and modeling.

NVivo is intended to help users organize and analyze non-numerical or unstructured data. Unlike quantitative software, Nvivo does not conduct the analysis and produce an output for the researcher. NVivo allows users to classify, sort, and arrange information; examine relationships in the data; and combine analysis with linking ideas, shaping analysis, searching for key themes, and modeling of data. Researchers can test theories, identify trends, and cross-examine information in a multitude of ways using its search engine and query functions. Researchers can make observations in the software and build a body of evidence to support their case or project. (Nvivo 9, 2011).

All memos (short-form, long-form, and intermediary) and interview transcripts were uploaded into the software package. To facilitate coding, variables from literature on the journalist-practitioner relationship (Aronoff, 1975a, 1975b), relationship management theory (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000), situational theory (Grunig, 1997), government public relations (Garnett, 1992; Graber, 1992), journalistic norms and routines (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978), as well as social network and social capital theory (Burt, 2005; Burt & Knez, 1995; Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1983) were employed. Using the variables and themes posited by this literature provided a basis for an initial examination of what trends existed in the state government setting that were present in other specific private and public sector settings.

The researcher also allowed for collection and analysis to include emergent themes discovered in the field and through interview responses that were unique to state government public information and news coverage. The rationale for this is the lack of contemporary literature on government communication (Garnett, 1992; Graber, 1992), as well as the evolution of the practices of journalism in light of its economic downturn and news model flux (McChesney, 2010). To account for emerging elements, an additional round of coding was used

with the data collected independent of the variables and themes identified in the body of literature.

The researcher then took the initial emergent code set and then consolidated the individual coded themes with the help of Ragin's (1987, 2008) truth tables. The truth tables allowed the researcher to identify consistent data patterns, variable relationships, and variables with substantive impact to consolidate the data into a tighter group of variables for analysis.

With the coding consolidated into a manageable set of variables, the researcher then used NVivo to analyze all identified coded items by identifying consistent patterns in the data, connecting key themes, and to conduct analysis of deviant cases and consider alternative hypotheses as a means of validation in answering each of the research questions posed. This process was accomplished by pulling up each section of central themes, and identifying instances where those themes intersected with other key themes. In the process, the research was able to identify instances where themes intersected, as well as identifying how that intersection related to each of the research questions posited above. This process helped the researcher identify patterns and understand how each pattern related to each research question.

In the course of data analysis, key patterns that were identified were also analyzed on an individual basis in order to identify how the emergent themes fit into the context of the broader body of data, as well as within each research question. In order to analyze identified themes, the researcher wrote supplemental analytical memos on each of the emergent themes, determining how the theme related to each research question, how the theme impacted the body of knowledge in the study, and how this theme influenced the broader thinking about the research context and existing theory. The supplemental memos were then uploaded into Nvivo, coded in the same manner as the original body of uploaded data, and then incorporated them into the analysis. This

process brought additional organizational focus to the researcher's analysis and stronger evidence to the working body of knowledge on the subject. It also permitted supplemental data collection in the process of analysis, which aided in accounting for ideas and themes not identified while engaged in data collection or writing preliminary memos on the subject.

After each question was analyzed using the themes identified in coding, analysis, and in supplemental analytical memos, the researcher then tested the identified themes against any deviant cases present to check for validity of conclusions, as well as against other types of theory that might better explain the data themes identified. On the basis of the themes the researcher identified to answer each question, and then tested, the reported findings were compiled using examples from the data, including quotes, summarizations of responses, and anecdotes from observation sessions to provide evidence for the findings put forward.

## **2.6 Methodological Challenges**

### **Sample**

Sample access was the first challenge. In the case of PIOs, the number of staff members within each office was in decline with continuing state budget cuts and the subsequent staff restructuring that took place with it (Casper, April 18, 2011). The original conception of conducting multiple interviews at each of the observation sites was altered and broadened to include current and former PIOs.

Shrinking newsrooms as a result of the economic climate of journalism (McChesney & Nichols, 2010) also weakened the pool of viable journalists to interview. The researcher modified the original design by incorporating former journalists familiar with covering state

agencies. This broadened the perspective, while deepening the pool. The pool included reporters, news directors, and hybrid reporter/anchors.

### **Internal Validity**

Yin (2009) noted that a common criticism of case study analysis is that it lacks internal validity. However, case studies overcome concerns of internal validity through strict testing of existing theories. The researcher grounded the research questions, the interview protocol, and data analysis in RMT (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000, 2007), situational theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), existing research on government public relations (Garnett, 1992; Graber, 1992), journalistic norms and routines (Ahmad, 2010; Bivens, 2008; Gans, 1979; Robinson, 2010; Tuchman, 1978), social network theory (Burt, 1992, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1983).

### **External Validity**

Another common criticism of case study analysis concerns the generalizability of data. This concern is a consequence of choice of methods, but Yin (2009) explains the rationale behind the decision: case study analysis is grounded in the application of analytical generalization rather than statistical generalization. Analytical generalization is akin to experimental research because it tests an existing or new theory against a narrow set of conditions (or cases) in order to incrementally build on the existing knowledge through validation or rejection.

Little is known about the current working relationship between PIOs and journalists, and the goal of the researcher was to begin building knowledge of the subject, by testing the given context against existing bodies of knowledge on practices and searching for emerging concepts. Once a greater body of knowledge is present about the conditions, the practices, and the impact

working relationships have on media relations between PIOs and journalists, the researcher will refine and broaden research to more states and on themes that prove critical in the PIO-journalist working relationship.

### **Rigor within Qualitative Research**

Another common concern when employing qualitative research methods is that the study will lack rigor. Rigor in methodology was attained by using several tools to improve the quality of data collection and analysis. To overcome potential researcher biases on self, respondents, and context in collection and analysis, self-reflexivity techniques in reflective logging, collection, and analysis of interview and observational data were employed to adapt research practices to overcome bias (Bernard, 2002b; Patton, 1980; Roulston, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

To strengthen analysis of both interview and observational data, the researcher also incorporated analytical induction by testing findings against deviant cases found in the study, by matching patterns across multiple data sources, and by testing alternative theories that might better explain the findings, using NVivo to facilitate the process. With each deviant case explained, each pattern corroborated across data sources, and each alternative hypothesis rejected or employed to better explain the data collected, the rigor of qualitative research data was strengthened (Roulston, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).



## **Chapter 3: The PIO Perspective**

The ability of PIOs to build and maintain productive relationships with journalists is influenced by several factors. Institutional pressures within state agencies to control messages and shape public opinion are born out of ignorance about the role of PIOs and the value of open accountability to the public through the media, limiting the ability of PIOs to be autonomous and responsive in an open and ethical manner. The level of centralization in communication within a state government limits information leaks and manages public opinion, but also limits PIO autonomy and engenders antagonism between journalists, PIOs, and state government. The economic decline of journalism is weakening the ability of journalists to engage in a fourth estate role and is creating a dependency among some journalist upon PIOs to aid the newsgathering process. Social and digital media are opening the door for attentive PIOs to build a direct line to the public for agency messages and information that bypasses the media filter, while providing a newsgathering resource for some journalists in newsgathering. Finally, ethical practices grounded in candor are building trust and mutual respect among PIOs and journalists as they interact over time. The present chapter discusses each of these factors in depth, and how they impact building and maintaining productive work relationships.

### **3.1 Who Are Public Information Officers?**

The majority of PIOs interviewed have educational backgrounds in broadcast or print journalism, public relations, communications, business, or marketing. Two have an education in political science. Two have a degree in English. And one has a degree in ethics and philosophy.

The experience of PIOs falls into one of four backgrounds: journalism, public relations in the private or public sector, political campaign professionals, or agency-related work.

Surprisingly, practitioners with a seminal background in journalism (12) outnumbered those with a background in public relations (9), or political science (5). Only two practitioners transitioned from a context-specific career in their agencies to PIO work.

With the exception of one PIO, those who have made the transition from journalism to public relations have been in the field for five or more years. When questioned about why they made the transition in careers, the rationale is consistently grounded in the economic decline of journalism. Commonly cited reasons are larger income, economic stability, and an inability to continue in a career that they love because of the inability for career advancement or lack of wage increases.

Marie Centanni was the Capitol reporter in Baton Rouge at WAFB for 4 years, with the intent of being a career Capitol reporter at the station. She has an advanced degree in political science and career experience working for a congressman in Washington, D.C. She established herself as a career journalist with a strong institutional knowledge of the beat she covered. After a few years, she found that the demands, low income, and lifestyle choices were problematic in committing to her original plan without an impractical move to a larger television market, or a promotion to an anchor's position, which she had no interest in taking. When asked about her reasoning, Centanni replied, "I tried to be a dedicated reporter in TV, and it worked out well, until I got married, bought a house, and decided to have children and realized I couldn't afford to do that forever. And I loved it! I just couldn't afford to do it" (June 22, 2011).

The other reason for the prevalence of former journalists in the field is the value that agencies put on journalistic backgrounds for PIOs, lending credence to the research of Howard (2004) on the value of incorporating knowledge of journalism in media relations. A practical knowledge of the psychology, practices, and strategies of journalists is viewed as a means of

managing news coverage tone and media attention for state agencies. After a diverse career in politics, education, and healthcare, freelance practitioner Rusty Jabour recounted his first interview with former Louisiana Attorney General William Guste who asked him to be his newsman for the Attorney General's office. Guste wanted Jabour to think and report like a journalist on the functions of the Attorney General's office to the public. In a sense, agencies see the value in applying journalistic norms and routines to aid in message craft, give and take with reporters, and media pitching.

The majority of PIOs interviewed (15) applied or were recruited for the job and cite previous contacts at the agencies where they were first hired or references with connections to the agency that helped open doors for them. Five PIOs cited previous internships in local or state government in college that led to a direct transition to PIO work in an entry-level position. Two practitioners cited a direct transition from politics to their positions in state government due to their work for the elected agency head or the party of the agency heads. Five others noted a direct transition to the agency by application and formal interview, devoid of a formal contact at the agency of first employment.

A surprising aspect of this study is that in spite of state politics and regime changes, the PIOs interviewed all had a long presence at the agency or within state government. A common theme--with the exception of four participants--is a long presence in the region where they worked. The journalists who made the transition had at least three years of experience as a reporter in the region or on the agency's beat. Even in cases of agency transition due to political appointment changes, the PIOs commonly found work at another agency in the state. A key factor in this stability is that PIOs are typically filling a politics-neutral position. A byproduct of the Gillett Amendment at the state level, PIOs in state government cannot fill a politically-driven

position. Therefore, most PIOs are not bound by the political ties that limit sustained employment.

PIOs interviewed have between three and 36 years of professional experience working for the state agency they are currently employed by, or within local or state government. The lone exception is Geoff Greenwood of the Iowa Attorney General's office, who replaced his predecessor, Robert Brammer, in 2010 when Brammer retired after 32 years of employment. Brammer informed Greenwood of the impending opening and hoped he would apply for the position on the basis of Greenwood's work as a television reporter at KCCI in Des Moines, Iowa covering primarily crime and courts, including the AG's office over the course of 20 years.

PIOs have a background in a communications field, whether it falls in public relations or journalism. The majority of PIOs interviewed have a background in professional experience or education in journalism, suggesting an emphasis on the importance of understanding the practices of journalists covering state agencies, providing further evidence in support of Howard's (2004) argument for the benefit of public relations practitioners possessing knowledge of journalism. Practitioners working as PIOs have a strong background in the organizations they work for. Going further, entry into this work environment usually hinges on a strong relationship with professionals within the state where they work and a track record of effective work in journalism or public relations, as well as a healthy institutional knowledge of where they are working. With an understanding of who PIOs are, the chapter now shifts focus to the first factor that influences working relationships between PIOs and journalists.

### **3.2 Institutional Pressures**

PIOs must earn the trust, respect, and understanding of their colleagues within their state agency in order to be most effective in building and maintaining relationships with the journalists

covering state government. This is also true for building and maintaining strong relationships between the agency and key publics, including citizens. In order to earn trust within an agency, a PIO must negotiate the pressure of agency administrators and staff to control messages and information that reach the public, while trying to operate in an open and ethical manner in communicating the practices of government. To help overcome this pressure, PIOs must work to build a sense of understanding among agency staff and administrators about the role of PIOs, the value of open accountability to the media, and the challenges that manipulation and obstruction can create for state agencies and state governments with the journalists that report on their work. Negotiating internal pressures while striving to build trust with reporters is in keeping with Burt's (2005) emphasis on bridges forming structural autonomy between their own network and the external networks they seek to build connections with.

The pressure to control message and the information that reaches the public is grounded in an administrative desire to control public opinion about the practices of an agency, its staff, and its administrators. In state government, public opinion dictates the long-term viability of an agency and its effectiveness in performing tasks. In each of the states researched, the state legislature dictates annual budget allocations, passes legislation that dictates the policy each agency enforces, and approves executive appointments to each state agency. The governor in each state studied appoints administrators affiliated with each state agency that the legislature must approve. Agency reputation is critical with legislatures and governors, because poor reputations can lead to budget reductions, unapproved policies for the agency, and changes in agency administration. Bob Johannessen, formerly of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, discussed the dynamic between elected officials and his agency, and how it is often shaped by public opinion and political issues. He noted the need for sensitivity with elected

officials when talking about developing health communication campaigns on controversial topics, like the use of contraception during safe sex:

The key audiences you always had in mind were, “How is this going to be viewed by elected officials because they control your purse strings and they always had the ability to call you before a committee and chew you out?” . . . So, and that was a conversation I had over and over again with public health officials because they had a belief and they are absolutely right that in order to change a behavior amongst the public with public messages, you have to have a very strong message: “This is your brain, this is your brain on drugs.” But when it comes to sex and drugs, they are both third rails, and they are particularly strong 3rd rails of a Republican administration. And, but if you wanted to reduce the risk of AIDS and STDs in a commercial, a visual of a penis with a condom being rolled on it was a very graphic commercial that could probably get people's attention, and it played well for the public health audiences when they played it for their audiences, but. You put that same message in front of a legislator; the reaction is, “we're taking all of your funding” (June 15, 2011).

PIOs feel the pressure not only from elected officials but also from administrators and staff to control messages and information that reaches the public and politicians through news media. Darin Mann is a former radio news reporter and a veteran PIO of several state agencies in Louisiana. Among the challenges Mann cites is having to overcome administrative pressures to get good press. While working in the Department of Labor, Mann's administrator denied a journalist's request to participate in a radio interview, the reporter released a story about the agency that was unflattering. The media inquiry occurred in 1999 during then Governor Mike Foster's run for re-election, and the agency administrator was particularly concerned about the fear of not being reinstated after the election.

When talking to Mann about it, the administrator repeatedly asked why Mann, “could not control the f\*\*\*\*\* media,” because the administrator believed that Mann's job was to kill stories and influence press coverage of the agency. Mann's response was indicative of the challenge each PIO faces, as he explained to his boss that his job was to inform the public about

the agency's operations and to facilitate journalists' queries in an open and ethical manner, not to purely seek good press.

Mann's experience with his former administrator illustrates a problem many PIOs face in performing their jobs while attempting to build trust within their agencies. In many cases, agency staff and administrators are not always clear about the role of PIOs, the practices of journalists, the value of working openly with the media, and the potential threat that consistent manipulation of journalists poses for an agency and its staff over time. Both Johannessen and Mann provide examples of how agency and government pressures to control messages can act as forces of closure, preventing PIOs from brokering relationships with journalists (Burt, 2005). Agency members believe they can safeguard their positions and programs by keeping communication channels on the same page by instilling a network-wide apprehension of journalists and a belief that PIOs should be controlling the media and public opinion, rather than informing the public in an effort to demonstrate agency accountability.

PIOs who are most successful in media relations have a strong sense of mutual trust with and respect with their agency's staff and administrators. This sense of respect and trust is built on a strong understanding of the purpose for a PIO within a state agency. At the administrative level, all PIOs discussed the importance of being included in the decision-making process, and having a direct line to the decision-makers in their agencies. Meg Casper, of the Louisiana Board of Regents, characterized the relationship that she maintained with each director she's worked with since moving from journalism to PIO work as "A good marriage." She states that being in a situation where either of you feels like you cannot walk into the other's office and lay the facts out bare and explain why you think that way is probably a situation where you have to reassess your role with the agency or look for a job where you can feel that way (June 10, 2011).

PIOs also express the importance of staff members understanding the nature of journalism, and the importance of responding to media queries in a timely manner. PIOs explain that having the ability to walk into a colleague's office in the agency, and have the individual set aside the current task and respond to their needs helps them build better media relationships. A common frustration for PIOs is a lack of understanding of the difference in work rhythms between a state agency and a news organization. The constant demand for new information and shrinking deadlines in journalism are a practical aspect that PIOs must work over time to help agency staff members understand. Prompt responses to journalists improve not only the working relationships between PIOs and journalists, but also between state agencies and journalists. The more productive the working relationships are over time, the better an agency's reputation for open communication and accountability.

To overcome agency ignorance and promote understanding of the work of PIOs and the importance of good media relationships, PIOs must fill an educator's role, helping agency administrators and staff to build a knowledge and appreciation of the practices and value of maintaining open and accountable working relationships with journalists. Consequently, filling this educator's role is in accordance with Relationship Management Theory's argument that public relations practitioners must fill a mediator's role between their organizations and publics to help build mutual understanding and facilitate mutually beneficial relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). From a social network theory perspective, PIOs can help overcome forces of closure by instilling understanding and appreciation of the media and PIOs. In the process, changing the administrative philosophy on media relations over time will help shift a force of closure to a force of brokerage and enhance the ability of PIOs to build working relationships with journalists by establishing structural autonomy between the networks (Burt, 2000, 2005).



John Hagerty of the Virginia Lottery benefits from having an administrator who worked in television news and was a mass communication professor before being appointed to her current position as director of the agency. The director's perspective on the practice of journalism and shared experience in television news is imparted on each member of the agency's staff, enabling Hagerty to be much more expedient in response to media queries on a daily basis. The agency's appreciation of the value of strong media relationships, not simply a practical knowledge of journalism, enables strong working relationships because of trust in Hagerty to work with journalists with the long-term, best interests of the agency at heart.

Trust in PIOs and an appreciation for strong media relationships provide PIOs with autonomy, which is critical for enhancing pragmatic value of PIOs with journalists. Autonomy comes when PIOs have the trust and respect of an agency's staff and administration. They have the latitude to be responsive and flexible in meeting the needs of journalists in a timely and flexible manner. Timeliness and flexibility enhance the overall reputation of a PIO for responsiveness and enhances a PIO's practical value to journalists. A PIO's ability to be responsive is not always contained within their agency, but may be influenced at the state level. The next section addresses the impact of this specific form of influence on working relationships.

### **3.3 Centralization of Government Communication**

An important characteristic that influences PIOs' ability to work with journalists is the degree of centralization within their state government's communication strategies. The choice to centralize communication within a state government is a strategic decision made within the Governor's office, and is a practice focused on unifying the communication that comes from the Governor and each of the subordinate agency offices in the executive branch of a state government. Each of the three states studied had different degrees of centralization within their

state's communication strategies. To that extent, each of the three state governments also had differing relationships with the journalists who cover their state governments. This section of the chapter discusses each of the three states' degree of centralization, the rationale behind the decision to centralize or not, and the impact on PIOs and media relationships as a result.

Louisiana is the most highly centralized of the three states studied. Since Governor Bobby Jindal's election in 2007, his press office coordinates communication with PIOs at the state agencies most pertinent to his policy agenda. When a major event occurs, the Governor's office takes point in releasing information and crosschecks the releases of the relevant agencies to insure that every agency is consistent in releasing the same information. Former Governor Kathleen Blanco also employed a measure of coordination, as her communication office coordinated a communication council with the PIOs in all state agencies on a monthly basis.

The key difference between Blanco's approach and Jindal's is the aggressiveness in eliminating leaks. Coordinated, centralized messages also come with a closed gate policy with journalists, limiting the availability of expert sources within agencies, as well as the responsiveness of PIOs to media queries on critical policy issues. Individuals who break this policy and leak information or go off script from the Governor's office on message face severe penalties. Marie Centanni, former press secretary during the Blanco administration and currently a freelance communication specialist in state government, explained the benefit of maintaining a closed gate and keeping messages highly centralized. She explained that her time working with former Governor Blanco was plagued by leaks to journalists and media personalities around the state when there were internal disagreements between members of the administration. Under the Jindal administration, there are few situations where staff members leak information or go off message, for fear they will lose their position. Meg Casper echoed these sentiments, explaining

that there is a motive behind maintaining a tight lid on external communication grounded in pushing a consistent message and avoiding perceptions of external conflict.

The prospect of this researcher studying the media relations practices of state government PIOs in Louisiana was met with apprehension in many cases, and ignorance in others. In cases where inquiries for an interview or visitation were refused, reasons behind the refusal were consistently founded on concerns about confidentiality, administrative sensitivities to the timeframe for publication of the research document, and concerns that internal conversations would become a matter of public record via the dissertation. Even in venues where the researcher had complete access for observation and interview, there were occasional administrative meetings where a researcher's presence was unwelcome. The most illustrative example of a closed gate policy comes from the Governor's communication office, where five emails and three calls during the month of focused research netted no response from Governor Jindal's communication director, Kyle Plotkin. These responses were indicative of the concern Louisiana's state agencies have about open communication with any outside observer.

Centanni concedes that there are potential problems that centralized communication creates with reporters. Centralization limits a PIO's ability to be responsive to journalists in an efficient manner, because he or she must have critical communication approved before responding to reporters. Accessibility to a diverse set of authoritative sources that journalists seek is also limited because higher centralization often means restricting public communication to a few spokespersons, rather than maintaining open communication policies for any agency staff member. The press releases that are disseminated by the Governor's office and each of the affiliated agencies are virtually identical, which offers no diversity in perspectives on an issue or

event for journalists to incorporate in stories about the releases. All of this together is a strong source of frustration for journalists, which can damage working relationships with PIOs.

However, even with these hindrances, Centanni has noticed, based on clues in their coverage, that journalists seem to have become accustomed to the lack of open dialogue and that the initial friction with reporters that cover state government is subsiding. Journalists do not necessarily share this perspective, which will be a focus in the next chapter. High centralization of communication closes channels between PIOs and journalists, and acts as a barrier to building relationships. Thus, centralization is a force of closure limiting negotiated, productive working relationships between PIOs and journalists (Burt, 2005). The frustration of journalists with the centralization of Louisiana's government supports Ryan and Martinson's (1988) finding that public relations practitioners that deceive and obstruct journalists are sources of antagonism between journalists and practitioners.

Governor Jindal feels comfortable maintaining a restrictive, centralized communication strategy because of the shift in the political climate within Louisiana. Since taking office in 2007, Louisiana has come to identify more actively with conservative ideologies and the Republican Party in every election. As of this legislative session, the governorship and both legislative bodies in Louisiana are currently under Republican control, either by electoral outcome or Democratic and Independent legislators changing their party affiliations. During the 2011 gubernatorial election, Jindal was re-elected with 65% of the vote, and his nearest competitor on an open ballot had 17% of the vote. Without fear of losing a majority vote, Jindal feels no need to maintain an open, accountable communication strategy. Jindal is also likely maintaining a tight lid because of long-term, national political aspirations. Having been elected Governor twice after two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, there are regular references that Jindal has

interest in the senate or the presidency. Many of the PIOs and journalists interviewed emphasized that Jindal's long-term interests did not necessarily coincide with the interests of Louisiana's residents.

Given the amount of leverage Jindal currently has in Louisiana, his communication strategy to centralize is a particularly strong force of closure, making it more difficult for PIOs to overcome its restrictions build a sense of autonomy in working with journalists and the public. This finding supports Burt's (2005) position that strong forces of closure in tight-knit networks can eliminate the ability of individuals to broker weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) with other networks. This also explains in part why Jindal has minimal concern for the impact of antagonism on news coverage of him and its subsequent impact on public opinion.

Iowa, conversely, is proactively emphasizing open dialogue with the public, including improved media relations under their most recently elected governor, Terry Branstad. Branstad worked actively with the legislature in Iowa to pass legislation that required more open communication and accountability with Iowa's residents. There are several reasons for this difference in the choice to communicate openly rather than centralize. The first reason is that Branstad is finishing a successful political career, rather than seeking the next opportunity. This is his fifth term as Governor of Iowa, having come back to the position after 10 years out of public office. Several state employees expressed that this will likely be Branstad's last term in office and that he ran for election to help reform current problems in the state before once again retiring from public office.

The second reason for Branstad's decision to push open and accountable communication is derived from the previous approaches of the past two administrations toward public communication and media relations. Several PIOs and journalists in Iowa discussed that the

current media relations practices under the Branstad administration are much more amenable than under the Vilsack or Culver administrations. During the Vilsack administration, the media relations strategy was to centralize all good news at the Governor's office, while deflecting negative news to the relevant, subordinate agencies. The goal was to keep the message on point with his office, but to also keep news that builds a good reputation focused on the governor, while minimizing bad news affiliated with Vilsack's administration.

While this may have helped Governors Vilsack and Culver, the journalists covering government did not respond well to Shannahan's strategy. Kevin Baskins, a PIO for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, was a political reporter in Iowa during the first Branstad administration. During observation at his office, he recalled his experience during that period and noted the aggravation that Shannahan's approach to "hiding the ball" with reporters created. For Branstad, there is a strategic sense that ground could be gained with the veteran press corps in Iowa by striving to keep communications channels open.

To Branstad's credit, the byproduct is a much more civil working environment between PIOs and journalists. While agencies will interface and follow up with one another after talking to a journalist, the lack of centralization enables greater autonomy among Iowa's PIOs, permitting them to work much more quickly, to be more responsive, and to provide greater accessibility to sources within state agencies. The group of journalists interviewed in Iowa cited a much better experience working with PIOs in Iowa since Branstad's administration took office. This supports research on journalist-practitioner relationships that suggest open access can help facilitate productive relationships (Howard, 2004; Sallot & Johnson, 2006).

From a research standpoint, responsiveness and accessibility were much more open in Iowa than in Louisiana. PIOs were much more open to interviews, and the limitations on

observation were a byproduct of scheduling conflicts due to the legislature having just closed session, much more often than a byproduct of administrative apprehension or concern.

The commonwealth government of Virginia falls between Iowa and Louisiana in terms of its communication centralization. The largest population of the three states studied and the proximity to Washington, D.C. both contribute to a much more complex and geographically spread commonwealth government. Unlike Louisiana and Iowa, Virginia has agency branch offices in multiple regions throughout the commonwealth on the basis of population density or geographic relevance. The multiplicity of agency offices requires each office to have a PIO that works directly with journalists in their region while reporting back to the central office in Richmond. This process of interfacing with other branch offices and the central office in Richmond ultimately slows the pace of response and makes PIOs less responsive and flexible in answering media queries, resulting in more frustration from journalists covering regional offices or state government.

However, the number of agency branch offices and the specificity of some media queries that focus on elements unique to the region create situations where a centralized approach serves no benefit to the state agency. Lauren Hansen of the Hampton Roads branch of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is the PIO for one of nine district offices in the state. She notes that the geographic spread of agency offices and number of media outlets result in situations when she has to consult with the central office in Richmond or a pertinent regional office on stories that may include them. More often, she will get a call from a reporter that is about a region-specific fact or official, which has no impact on the central agency administration or other regions. In such cases, Hansen has the latitude to be responsive and flexible in meeting media demands within the scope of her regional office. So, PIOs in Virginia must deal with

centralization and coordination on some aspects, but also have greater autonomy in responding to the media than do PIOs in a highly centralized, small government like Louisiana's.

The proximity of Virginia to Washington, D.C. also means that PIOs in Richmond must account for national, as well as regional, media coverage for the District of Columbia. The large number of state residents that commute to the nation's capital means that capital-region media have reporters covering Virginia's government on behalf of their audience. In addition, national media organizations like *The Washington Post* and *Politico* maintain active reporting presences in Richmond to cover the state legislature and Governor Bob McDonnell, who is an active political figure at the state and national level. The larger media presence and the wider spectrum of media attention that PIOs in Virginia must account for require more strategic centralization of communication to manage the glut of inquiries and maintain message consistency.

Governor Bob McDonnell's political ambitions may also play a role in the higher centralization as well. McDonnell is currently among those actively being considered for a Vice Presidential bid on the Republican ticket in the 2012 presidential election. Greater political prominence draws greater attention from news media at the local and national level, and demands greater caution in managing communication that reaches the public. Thus, it is unsurprising that there is more centralization in communication between agencies and the governor's office in responding to media on policy issues and events important to the long-term plans of Governor McDonnell.

The split between centralization and open communication creates a more mixed perspective on working relationships among Virginia journalists. There are considerably fewer complaints from journalists about obstruction or deception than in Louisiana, though there are situations that some find to be frustrating. As one might expect, the nature of the relationship can



range from collaborative to antagonistic, depending on the day or story being covered. With the impact of centralization explained, the focus now shifts to the economic decline of journalism and PIO's application of journalistic norms and routines.

### **3.4 Economic Pressures on Journalists' Norms and Routines**

The impact of corporatization and recent economic downturns on journalism are putting pressure on journalists to produce more content at faster rates than ever before with fewer resources to do so. PIOs who understand these economic pressures that journalists are currently under have a better opportunity to build strong relationships because of the practical value they have for journalists working to fill content demands within deadlines. PIOs are able to most effectively help journalists manage economic pressures if they apply journalistic norms and routines in their approach to media relations. The attention to journalists' needs and the pressures they are under is in keeping with Howard's (2004) finding that attending to practical needs of journalists enhance working relationships.

The pressure to produce more material quickly is creating a need for journalists to make newsgathering more efficient. Responsiveness to media queries is a means for PIOs to help journalists address these demands. It is the most commonly referenced factor cited by PIOs that helps establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships. Responsiveness attends to a journalist's shrinking deadlines and gives a journalist time to receive the information provided, vet the information for accuracy, and then apply it to the story. When visiting with Geoff Greenwood at the Iowa AG's office, the researcher observed that long-term projects were set aside when a reporter called. Elaine Lidholm, the media representative for the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in Richmond, Virginia, commented on her policy when it applies to media responsiveness. Lidholm's approach echoes that of Greenwood:

If I don't take it when they call. If I'm sitting in my office, working on something else, and I look over and see a reporter's call on my caller ID, I drop what I'm doing and pick up. And then, I have a message on my phone that says, "I'm sorry I missed your call, leave me a message after the beep. If this is extremely urgent, press 0 any time before the beep, and someone else will help you." And that goes to Joyce, sitting out here first, and if she goes on break, it goes to the commissioner's secretaries, so there's someone that can say, "Oh, she is here today, she must just be in the bathroom, let me take a message." So, I can't tell you how many times a week I get responses from reporters, especially if it's via e-mail, "Thank you for responding so quickly." (August 5, 2011)

Responsiveness is something many PIOs convey as a practical way of demonstrating respect for journalists and the pressures that they are coping with. Going along with the principle of responsiveness is timeliness in responding to a journalist's call. Renée Greer of the Louisiana Board of Education is committed to being responsive beyond a typical work day. She keeps her cell phone on "24/7" to receive calls from journalists covering education in Louisiana. Likewise, Sheila McCant of the Louisiana House of Representatives takes media calls either in her office or on her cell phone well after hours from reporters seeking clarifications on story elements. Melanie Stokes in the Richmond, Virginia VDOT office has been in to help reporters covering a story over weekends and on holidays when crisis scenarios emerge. Many of the PIOs interviewed made some reference to prefacing their phone conversations with journalists with some variation on the phrase, "What's your deadline? What do you need?" Meg Casper with the Louisiana BOR notes that such questions tell a reporter from the start that the PIO understands their timeline is tight, and that the PIO is willing to get down to business with them in the process (June 6-10, 2011).

PIOs can also facilitate newsgathering for journalists under current economic pressures by providing authoritative, credible sources and information. Journalists need authoritative sources to verify facts and lend credibility to their coverage. PIOs can more effectively build and maintain relationships by providing greater accessibility to expert sources and information. PIOs

work to get reporters the accessibility that they need, within practical limits. Journalist access to the director depends on the director's prerogative. Access to expert sources, likewise, is dependent upon their willingness to help. PIOs must have the trust of agency staff members and administrators to be able to gain their cooperation in working with the media.

Access to information and expert commentary is not always possible. Often, agency experts or directors will ask PIOs to speak for them. Thus, PIOs should be a trusted member of the management team in the agency. PIOs stressed the importance of their position having a direct line to the director's office, and to have the trust of agency staff. Meg Casper characterized the relationship she maintained with each director she's worked with as "a good marriage." (June 10, 2011)

Multiple PIOs stressed the point that the trust of the agency's decision-makers, or dominant coalition (Grunig, 1992), allows a PIO to be seen by journalists as a part of the decision-making group in an agency and therefore someone that could be a credible information source. Chris Frink calls it "knowing and having access to your principals in an organization" (June 17, 2011). A position in the administration grants one access to the information and decision-making process that journalists are trying to understand, and facilitates flexibility and dynamism for PIOs to be able to effectively answer questions for journalists, providing additional support for Howard (2004), as well as Sallot & Johnson (2006). By establishing a position within an agency's governing body, PIOs also fill a devil's advocate role within the decision-making group, helping agency administrators and staff understand the potential implications of their decisions with journalists and the public with respect to specific communication strategies and policy decisions, which is also in keeping with Ledingham and Bruning's (1998) call for public relations practitioners to fill a mediator's role when working to

build stronger relationships between an organization and its publics, including the media (Ledingham & Bruning, 2007).

As a former reporter, Kevin Baskins noted that having the ability to joke with reporters about their current challenges in the workplace softens many of the conversations and lets them know he understands, and that he is there to help where he can (July 19, 2011). An eye towards shrinking deadlines, shrinking newsrooms, expanding workloads, and disappearing news entities provides PIOs a means of identifying with journalists in the workplace and a bridge where they can convey the desire to engage in the mutually beneficial relationships with publics that scholars like Ledingham and Bruning (1998) were interested in, through the practices outlined by Howard (2004), Sallot and Johnson (2006), and Ledingham & Bruning (2007).

Part of aiding journalists in managing pressures to produce content is having the ability to provide substantive news content in media pitches that adheres to news values at times when reporters need help filling demand. This aspect plays on narrative and news values that journalists consistently are working to satisfy in coverage in order to improve their status in an organization. John Hagerty, a former television reporter and PIO for the Virginia Lottery, provided an excellent example of a news brief he posted:

We rarely get any news coverage in the *Washington Post*, for example. But, there was one time in which we had a big Lottery winner in Springfield. She told us she couldn't get to her favorite 7-Eleven because she was cut off in traffic. She had to go to a different store a mile away. She bought a Lottery ticket and it turned out to be a huge winner. So I wrote a news release stating that, for once, there's someone thankful for Northern Virginia traffic. I sent it to the *Washington Post* and they loved it! When I got a call from the *Post* reporter, I thought, "You're kidding! You want to talk to me?" (August 19, 2011).

By playing on news values like the novelty of good fortune coming from a bad situation, and proximity to a specific neighborhood in northern Virginia, Hagerty was able to draw the interest of a reporter in need of some content on a slow news day. That attention got positive

news about his organization in the largest newspaper circulating in the state of Virginia, working to enhance agency reputation. (August 19, 2011)

“Slow news day stories” are a tool that Hagerty recommends that PIOs keep handy for situations like he encountered as a television reporter at Channel 6 in Richmond, Virginia. It was 10 in the morning; his news director approached him, and said, “John, I need a story from you by 3.” Fortunately, Hagerty keeps a file cabinet folder with story ideas that the average reporter has not approached him with four times in the past 10 years. If a reporter calls tired of using the same news angle, Hagerty proposes an idea like, “How about you interview the woman who’s signed every check over to a winner since the Virginia Lottery started in 1988? She’s got a lot of great winner stories.” The ability to provide a reporter a fresh news angle in a time crunch permits Hagerty to open greater avenues for his organization in the press (Hagerty, August 19, 2011).

In a competitive news market, PIOs need to attend to the quality of their news pitches because they need to beat out other stories in the news cycle with overtaxed reporters. Darin Mann expressed this thought when asked about the value of substantive news content:

With everybody wanting a piece of the media pie, you have to come with some pretty good stuff--and when they come calling, you have to be a) receptive, and b) meet their deadline, you know, take care of what they need--and get back to 'em, because nothing pisses them off more than if you don't get back to them. Because they've got their deadline, and I think we all face our challenges. (June 30, 2011)

Mann’s comments illustrate how to apply a journalist’s thought process when pitching story ideas to journalists as a PIO. Much like his colleagues who have come to PIO work from journalism, an inherent sensitivity to the work environment of journalists is crucial in strategically targeting news outlets for release. Journalists typically ignore the media pitches PIOs submit en masse via e-mail or in hard copy. George Sells, a former anchor and reporter in New York, Philadelphia, Denver, and Baton Rouge had a career that has spanned 54 years. He

illustrates this point when he reiterates that the vast majority of e-mails and hard copy from practitioners and PIOs go to his SPAM filter and trashcan (June 16, 2011). Inundating a reporter who has to manage a glut of information creates a “Chicken Little” effect for a PIO, where the announcement of news events will get ignored.

These are points of emphasis for Marie Centanni in her current role as a consultant for organizations that work in and with the state government of Louisiana. She likes to call the practice “news brokering,” and she shared a particularly instructive story when interviewed on her approach to media pitching:

A client of mine called, it was actually a friend of mine. She said, “I want to get some coverage for my business. Do I just send out a press release?” I said, “No, because who cares? Who cares? Why would they cover it?” And so, I spent some time with her at her business, and learned what they do, and really it's something people would be interested to know about. It was a health service that provided art therapy for clients with severe mental disabilities like autism and Alzheimer's, all sorts of things. They actually operate a commercial art gallery featuring their patients' work. So, [I] called the news director at Channel 3 [KATC in Lafayette, Louisiana], came in with my friend, told her what she did, and said, “Look what she does. Wouldn't this be a great story?” And she said, “yeah, Oh my God! We would totally do that story!” And I said, “Wouldn't it be good to do part of your Live Festival International coverage?” And she said, “Yes! I didn't think about that! That would be perfect!” So, hopefully--I've kind of developed a reputation with reporters where if I'm calling, it's not for a ribbon-cutting. It's actually for a good story.” (June 20, 2011)

Thus, Centanni and other PIOs are attending to transactional aspects of RMT (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000) when they attempt to consistently meet the demands of journalists covering state agencies. PIOs can build and maintain productive working relationships with journalists by building mutual understanding with PIOs and meeting their practical needs. Centanni is in congress with the principles of situational theory of publics (Grunig, 2009) when she strategically segments journalists. She identifies the specific needs of reporters, the needs of their news organizations, the practical challenges each journalist faces, and the professional practices of each journalist.

Once PIOs have successfully segmented the members of the media on the basis of their needs, practices, news organizations, and challenges, they can strategically craft messages that better meet the needs of journalists or news organization. In the process, PIOs can better accommodate the challenges and practices of each journalist and news organization. By more specifically meeting the needs of journalists, PIOs can cultivate a reputation for more effectively meeting the needs of each journalist, supporting principles of RMT (Ledingham & Bruning, 2007). Also in keeping with situational theory, PIOs must monitor the needs of journalists over time and adapt to meet emerging needs. The constant evolution of news models in response to the decline of journalism demands greater flexibility on the part of PIOs in responding to media queries. Greater fluidity in media relations will help enhance a PIO's reputation for being reliable in responding to journalists' needs. This is in keeping with Grunig's (2009) call to be adaptive in meeting demands of strategically segmented publics under situational theory.

A final tool that can help PIOs with reporters is adhering to format standards and practical considerations of journalists. Chris Frink, a speech writer for former Governor Kathleen Blanco, noted the importance of attending to practical considerations when responding to the media, making a media pitch, or planning an event where the PIO invites the media. Accounting for practical needs like live shots and on-camera interviews for television reporters, or speaking in sound bites for radio reporters in order to better enable editing for broadcast in hourly news briefs is critical in building a position of reliability with reporters for PIOs. Accounting for the practical challenges to facilitate coverage of agency events enhances a PIO's reliability to journalists and strengthens the working relationships and the PIO's reputation.

Applying journalistic norms and routines help establish value with journalists in a variety of ways. Responsiveness in a timely manner demonstrates respect for journalists' work and

deadlines over time and helps establish a sense of reliability among journalists. Accounting for the practical pressures and challenges of journalists also helps establish reliability and a sense of concern for them as professionals. Another means of building a reputation for reliability is to provide substantive access and resources to journalists in responding to media queries and in disseminating media pitches. PIOs that adhere to journalistic norms and routines (Fishman, 1990; Gans 1979; Tuchman, 1978) are creating forces of brokerage (Burt, 2005) that facilitate negotiated, productive working relationships between PIOs and journalists that will enable them to better co-create an enlightened citizenry in time.

However, the ability to utilize these tools also creates a potential ethical problem for PIOs that contradicts their professional role. Chris Frink offers a prime example of the practice that creates this dilemma. When asked about his approach to release writing, he makes the following comment and notes that he's been frighteningly successful at getting the message directly transplanted in the paper:

I know that if I'm writing a press release, I use short sentences. If I'm writing a press release and someone at a weekly somewhere sees this release. They can just take the whole thing, whether it's a press release about Democratic [Caucus] policy or about a new Jell-O flavor. I should be able to take that press release, cut, paste, add a title that fits, and let that sucker run. (June 17, 2011)

Kevin Baskins describes a similar scenario in his work with the Department of Natural Resources in Iowa, but notes his own ethical concerns as a former print reporter:

From my own experience as a former reporter, I see some stuff out there that just absolutely horrifies me when I'm wearing my old media reporter hat, but it's really useful in my role as a PIO. An example of that is even when I kind of got out of newspapering in 1998, if you ran a press release, copy and paste, and if you even took a direct quote from a press release and didn't identify that as such, you were probably walking the next day. And now that is a common practice. I've even seen one daily, and it was a fairly substantial daily in Iowa, where their top story one day was a straight copy and paste from one of our press releases. It was word-for-word. In that way, there is a lot more opportunities for agencies like us. I think what you are seeing is a real crunch on resources within the media industry. At the same time that demands are getting higher



because they have a website to feed. I think about these reporters. When I was a reporter, 11:30 at night was that hardcore deadline [for submission]. And that was all you had to worry about. And now, I see reporters having to worry about three deadlines a day because they are feeding the web, and they've got fewer resources. So if you have an agency like ours that enjoys a high degree of credibility, and we do, then our stuff is going to get used, and there is some real value to the stuff that we put out from the agency standpoint. (July 19, 2011)

Several economic factors contribute to the ability of PIOs to manipulate reporters into publishing news stories in situations like the two discussed above. News organizations are hiring inexperienced reporters at lower wages to cover state government in positions once occupied by journalists with higher levels of education and experience in covering the beat. This is problematic because these reporters lack the intuition about state government to know where to look for information. This creates stronger reliance on PIOs for efficient information resources. News organizations are also downsizing their news staffs to cut operational costs. With the increasing demand to fill content demands at a faster pace among fewer reporters, the result is a group of overtaxed, inexperienced reporters that need to economize their time in meeting demands, supporting Singer's (2010) characterization of young journalists. If PIOs can help fill content demands and produce material that is in keeping with content format, then they can get their message through the media to the public with minimal resistance. The time demands on reporters mean there is less time to vet information for accuracy with multiple sources, so stories will at times make publication with no filtration from reporters.

This illustrates the dichotomous nature of the impact of journalism's decline as a profession in the past decade. In one sense, PIOs can apply principles to help journalists in the newsgathering process. However, the potential to abuse the relationship for professional advantage is there. The limitations on journalists to fulfill a fourth estate role in a thorough manner does create an opportunity for PIOs to exert some leverage on information and source

access, and to provide information that is supportive of their agencies. Strictly speaking, PIOs who adhere to the ethical boundaries of their position should openly disseminate the information about the practices of their agencies and state governments. Unfortunately, agency administrators and staff are effective in exerting pressures to control the message and media from administrators and staff on some PIOs. Eager to earn internal trust from administrators and staff, these PIOs intentionally abuse the working relationships with journalists to do so. This validates the research of past scholars on manipulation through media relations (Foley, 2004; Franklin, 2004).

So, PIOs who adhere to journalistic norms and routines and work with a sense of the economic pressures that influence reporters can improve working relationships. This finding supports Sallot and Johnson (2006) who found that public relations practitioners that attend to the practices of journalists in media relations facilitate more symbiotic working relationships. However, they can also abuse journalists and engender antagonism with their counterparts, supporting the work of Ryan and Martinson (1988).

PIOs who abuse relationships not only injure the working relationships with journalists, they also ignore their ethical responsibility to inform the public and co-create an enlightened citizenry. The abuses of the working relationships severely damage not only a PIOs' professional reputations, but also the reputations of their agencies and state governments. Damage to these reputations can ultimately have a severe impact on public support for the agency and its actions, as well as the support of legislators and governors. Relationships between PIOs and journalists are antagonistic when journalists feel manipulated, or are ignorant of the practices of PIOs (Aronoff, 1975a; Jeffers, 1977; Ryan & Martinson, 1988). The antagonism that such abuses create acts as a force of closure, inhibiting productive relationships with journalists (Burt, 2005).

### **3.5 Application of Technology**

PIOs are making use of multiple forms of technology to aid in effectively performing their jobs, and technologies are aiding them in improving working relationships with journalists. PIOs are also providing an interesting means of informing the public directly without having to deal with journalists or the filter they can create between the agency and the public. Mobile technology in the form of smart phones facilitates conversation, enables contact, and promotes responsiveness to reporters on the job. Meg Casper texts reporters using cell phone technology in legislative committee rooms to connect with journalists, to gauge what they were covering, and to discover what she might have to prepare for (June 6-10, 2011).

Email use by PIOs is proving to be the most efficient means of responsiveness when trying to contact reporters out in the field covering stories. Marie Centanni notes that she typically leans towards email over phone calls because of the propensity of reporters to be away from their desk during business hours, and the delay in reply that voice mail can create in comparison to the common practice of checking emails on cell phones (June 20, 2011).

Web sites provide an effective direct line to agency information when organized well and coordinated with the state government. Iowa and Virginia have recently completed a Web optimization program to streamline Web designs in an effort to promote a more open and transparent message dissemination to the public. The transition created a means of considering public demand over the egos of agency staff on having their material on the front page for Iowa's state agency Web sites. Agency Web sites are also proving to be a highly effective in connecting with reporters and providing an additional resource for reporters. The Iowa DOT is making effective use of posting media content couched in journalistic norms and routines on the Web

site and social and digital media conduits in an effort to provide stations and papers around the state with resources that they would not otherwise have access to (Gray-Fisher, July 18, 2011).

Social and digital media are still in experimental phases, but some early innovators are making highly effective use of these conduits in media relations and in direct contact with citizens and key publics with ties to the agency. Jacques Berry and his staff in the Louisiana Lieutenant Governor's office are making use of Facebook pages and Twitter feeds at state-run museums and parks to engage state residents and tourists to answer questions, to solve problems, and to promote upcoming events.

The Iowa DNR and Virginia Museum of Fine Arts are both making effective use of Facebook to engage citizens in two-way communication and to promote upcoming campaigns, as well as to provide a point of reference or contact with journalists. The Iowa DNR is using Flickr and YouTube as conduits for posting reference photos and instructional videos. The Louisiana House of Representatives is broadcasting press conferences and House proceedings on *U-Stream* and *Vimeo*, providing a direct line to the public. By engaging in media relations through Web sites and social and digital media, PIOs are reinforcing the findings of Shin and Cameron (2003a; 2003b). They found that the application of new communication technology also helps facilitate newsgathering, improving both PIO credibility and reliability. This finding also illustrates that new technologies can be a force for brokerage between PIOs and journalists (Burt, 2005). If effective, new technologies can be another means of earning trust and a reputation for reliability.

Conversely, social and digital media can also be a source of competition between journalists and PIOs for the attention of citizens looking for news and information about state government. Several PIOs began using social and digital media as a means of establishing a direct line with the public in an effort to avoid news media filters. Suzanne Hall characterized its

use as a means of reaching as wide a public as possible. Scholars like Burt (2005) would suggest that PIOs must be careful about treating it as a means of competition or bypass, because it can create antagonism and work as a force of closure. Hall, however, simply sees it as a means of approaching publics who may not attend to traditional news, or may see social and digital media conduits as their primary source for news and information. In a sense, there is no competition from her perspective, but another means to promote events on behalf of VMFA.

There are, however, limitations on the utility of social and digital media among PIOs. Resource constraints and lack of staff lead PIOs to complain that the added workload of managing feedback and keeping content fresh is too much to manage. Geoff Greenwood, PIO for the Attorney General of Iowa, talked about his failures in using Twitter. His attempts to post meaningful updates have been thwarted by other AG's offices that post anything and everything on social and digital media, as well as by protesters who have made use of trending hash tags to co-opt the Twitter feeds relating to the collaborative AG offices around the country.

Politically focused practitioners note threats to message consistency and to the privacy and safety of elected officials. Chris Frink spoke about seeing a new Edwin Edwards Facebook page in June, and commented that too much personal information is available to the public. Frink suggests that Facebook is a highly effective promotional tool that can generate grassroots campaigns against specific issues like Governor Jindal's cigarette tax repeal during the 2011 legislative session, but should not be a strategic means of providing the public access to politicians for two-way communication (June 17, 2011).

Some PIOs are concerned about the cacophony of conduits through which messages are conveyed, dulling an average citizen's attention to agency messages (Greenwood, July 25, 2011). However, other PIOs suggest that by not covering all of the potential new social and digital

media conduits, a PIO is potentially missing out on key publics that may only focus on that one conduit you are ignoring. With communication technologies address, the focus now shifts to the final factor of influence, the ethical behavior of PIOs when dealing with journalists.

### **3.6 Ethical Professional Interaction**

While there are avenues for PIOs to gain leverage over journalists in the current downturn in the practice of journalism, there is a widespread fear among PIOs of purposefully deceiving journalists. The professional networks of PIOs and journalist are tightly knit within Louisiana, Iowa, and Virginia. For most PIOs, there is a strong sense of ethical obligation to the mission of PIOs to provide information in an open and ethical manner. Sheila McCant, former PIO for the Louisiana House of Representatives, stated that her professional standard with her bosses was that she would never lie on their behalf to the media and that she would quit before doing so. PIOs consistently characterize trust as that “one chip” that a PIO builds up with reporters covering state government. In the event they lie to reporters, PIOs fear the media uncovering that deception, forever ruining their reputation in the community and state government. If PIOs lie at and are found out, then they are not only ruined at one agency, but at all other agencies within that state government. A trustworthy reputation and updated media contacts are two resources a PIO must have, but intentional deception ruins their reputation with reporters. The fear of ostracism among PIOs is akin to Burt’s (2005) discussion of dense social networks, and the challenges closure poses for bridges trying to build and maintain points of contact when they behave poorly or inconsistently.

Maintaining candor with journalists is a means of building trust and keeping it, as long as it is maintained consistently. Bob Johannessen described a situation where his agency’s administrators at the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) left him out of the

loop on an administrative decision to implement lie detector tests for citizens receiving state and federal benefits. After receiving a phone call from Marsha Shuler of *The Advocate* in which she asked him to confirm something that seemed so preposterous on first blush, he flat out denied it before asking her to wait while he confirmed or denied it with his superiors. After learning they had made the decision without consulting him, he leveled with Schuler and told her exactly what happened. When the story ran the next day, Shuler simply printed the fact that the testing would happen, and she left the miscue between Johannessen and his administrators out, which Johannessen held as a sign of respect for the candor and respect he gave her in an awkward situation (Johannessen, June 16, 2011). When PIOs are honest from the start and avoid intentional deception, Johannessen and other PIOs believe they earn media trust, respect, and a measure of protection in coverage on the practices of agency staff in controversial situations like this. Several current and former reporters in Louisiana acknowledge how much respect and trust they have for Johannessen when he responds to one of their requests, because they know he will not lie to them and that when they make an inquiry they will get a timely response.

Candor can come in the form of leveling with a reporter about the pragmatic elements related to a delay in accessibility or response, or simply using the words, “I don’t know.” Courtney Moyer, formerly of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, made the case that admitting ignorance of some material is acceptable, and even liberating, so long as you are honest about it:

I've realized it's OK to say, “I'm sorry, I don't know, let me get back to you on that.” And I was afraid to say I don't know at first for whatever reason. There is! That its I felt like I need to know everything, but it was a big load off when one time I finally said, “Look, I'm sorry, I just don't know that, let me get back to you on that.” And they were like, “Oh, no problem.” And I was like, “Oh! They're not mad at me!” (Laughing) It was a wonderful day! (August 25, 2011)

Moyer's story highlights that candor helps journalists understand what PIOs are dealing with. It also helps manage their expectations of PIOs in terms of what is a realistic time frame to anticipate a response. PIOs should avoid ignoring journalists when delays emerge. PIOs can help mitigate frustration and antagonism by openly explaining that the information or individual is not immediately available, but that a response will be coming within a realistic deadline. Thus, maintaining ethical obligations and candor over time also helps build trust and respect between PIOs and journalists, moving PIO-journalist relationships away from their previous antagonistic position (Sallot & Johnson, 2006).

In addition to consistently maintaining ethical and honest practices, PIOs also recommend establishing some personal interface that allows for some humanization with reporters that will help reduce friction and antagonism over time. Chris Frink suggests some casual conversation on the way to agency events to establish acquaintances. Bob Johannessen recommends face-to-face conversation whenever possible, because reducing barriers between PIOs and journalists "makes it awfully hard to hate the person when they are standing directly across from you" (June 15, 2011). Marie Centanni suggested her practice for engaging press row in casual conversation while she was working for former Governor Kathleen Blanco called "cookie calls":

When I worked for Governor Blanco, the Governor's mansion staff made the best chocolate chip cookies on a daily basis. It is staffed with inmates from Angola [State Penitentiary], and one inmate's job is to make the cookies. He's like the, "Time to make the donuts" guy. Makes the cookies. Every day. And so, you have to consume them, or they'll go to waste. Chocolate chip cookies. They're for guests at the mansion, but if they're not eaten you have to consume them, or they'll go to waste. So every day, if I had occasion to go to the mansion and do something, I would take a big Zip-Loc bag, and fill it with cookies, and when I got back to the building, to the capitol, I would go down to press row, and I would just hand out cookies. Just say, "Hey! Here's a cookie, Whatcha doin' today? Whatcha need? What's happening?" You know, feed them gossip, on a story I maybe wanted to suggest to them. But it gave me a reason to be down there, it kind of gave us a little bit of a personal relationship. (June 20, 2011)



Maintaining an ethical, honest approach with journalists is critical for PIOs in building and maintaining relationships with all journalists and colleagues in state government. PIOs can build trust with journalists and reputations as honest brokers of information on behalf of their agencies. Candor also enables a PIO to manage journalist expectations and demands. PIOs who maintain candor and make acquaintance with reporters are keeping with previous research on RMT (Ledingham & Bruning, 2007) in the context of media relations in private sector public relations that highlighted the benefit of utilizing relationship building strategies.

Maintaining ethics and candor in working with journalists also aids PIOs in building trust and respect with journalists over time. This is in keeping with the brokerage process that suggests consistently meeting expectations with a specific point of contact in another social network and their peers help reinforce weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) through establishing a consistent reputation for reliability and trustworthiness with the contact's third-party referents (Blau, 1974; Burt, 2005; Burt & Knez, 1995; Homans, 1961). By consistently being open and honest with journalists, PIOs can cultivate reputations as honest brokers with journalists that cover state government as a group. The focus now shifts from PIOs to their counterparts: journalists that cover government.

## **Chapter 4: The Journalist Perspective**

Several factors influence journalists and their working relationships with PIOs and their shared responsibility in co-creating an enlightened citizenry. Recent economic losses and the downturn in journalism have reduced the number of reporters and staff to provide coverage, increasing demands on reporters to provide content, all while coping with ever shrinking deadlines, creating a need to make up for lost means and time. Loss of profit and audience is creating growing institutional pressures within the newsroom on the practices of newsgathering in terms of tone, newsworthiness, and approach to interviewing prominent sources. A byproduct is a shift of focus in newsgathering away from accuracy towards getting the story out first. Centralization of communication in state government is a large source of frustration, and contributes to an antagonism between journalists and PIOs. New communication technologies are a growing part of journalists' daily workload, proving to be a resource and a burden. In addition, journalists that maintain a straightforward approach improve their reputation and level of trust with PIOs, enabling great access in covering stories. The present chapter expands on these elements and their impact on the working relationships journalists have with PIOs.

### **4.1 The Reporters Covering State Government**

Of 30 journalists interviewed, 21 have a bachelor's degree in a field directly connected to work in print or broadcast journalism. Five journalists earned a bachelor's degree in the field of study associated with the beat they are covering, while four others have a minor relevant to their reporting responsibilities. One has a degree in history and had a fellowship in politics.

Ten journalists have either earned a graduate degree in journalism or mass communications (four) or their beat (six), or taken graduate courses in the fields of study. In

addition, one third of the group possesses advanced degrees in their trade or beat, meaning they possess a strong contextual knowledge.

The journalists interviewed also possess extensive work experience. Three journalists have 1-5 years of experience, four have 6-10 years of experience, six have 11-15 years of experience, six have 16-20 years of experience, and 11 have more than 21 years of experience. The interviewee with the most experience was George Sells of WAFB in Baton Rouge, who had 54 years of experience in radio and television news reporting before his retirement in 2012.

In addition to journalistic experience, two reporters possess practical experience in the areas they cover. Ryan Nobles of NBC 12 in Richmond described his personal experience in state politics, his area of reporting:

I started out as a sportscaster. I worked in Rochester for a little while, and then I cut my teeth really in Utica which is a tiny market in between Syracuse and Albany. I did sports there for two years, and then made the transition to news, so then I was an anchor-reporter at a station--that same station.

I actually quit my job in 2002, and had an ill-fated run for the State Assembly of New York as an Independent. After I did that, I kind of wasn't sure what I was going to do. I worked construction for a little while, did a little bit of free-lance work, landed at WTEN in Albany which is the ABC affiliate there, which turned out to be a nice move for me because it's the state capital and politics being my interest. But I also decided I needed to have a back-up plan because television was unstable, so I went back and got my master's in public administration at SUNY Albany's Rockefeller school.

So I was working full-time as the morning anchor in Albany, and doing my master's at night. Then after I did, I was in Albany for about two and a half years, and then got an opportunity to actually work in state government back in Utica, and I worked as the county youth bureau director in Oneida County. Then at the time, my boss ran for the state senate, and so I worked on his campaign. He won and then brought me over to the state senate with him, so I was there for about six months when I got a call from a headhunter asking me if I ever thought about getting back into television, and if I'd ever been to Richmond, Virginia, and about two months later I was here, and I've been here ever since. (August 9, 2011)

Nobles' personal experience and education provides him with a greater depth of contextual

knowledge through personal experience, which is particularly helpful in his coverage of state and national politics as they intersect with Virginia's state capital, Richmond.

Another interviewee, Peter Frost, was a print reporter at *The Daily Press* in Newport News, Virginia. He covers commerce and business for the paper. He now covers business for *The Chicago Tribune*. He earned an undergraduate degree in business and worked at Target's corporate headquarters in Minnesota before returning to school at Northwestern to earn a master's degree in journalism.

The location of a news organization matters. Fourteen interviewees are currently working in or retired from their respective state capitol bureaus. An additional 10 print and broadcast reporters are situated in the capital city. The remaining six print and broadcast reporters work at local stations and papers outside of the state government setting.

Eighteen of the reporters work or worked previously in print journalism (either at a dedicated newspaper or for the Associated Press), seven broadcast reporters worked or currently work at television stations, and five currently work in radio reporting at state capitals.

## **4.2 Impact of Economic Decline on Journalism**

Economic flux in journalism (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 2010) is the strongest factor impacting work relationships between PIOs and journalists. Most news agencies encountered are experiencing, or have experienced, staff down-sizing in the past two years. *The Des Moines Register* had just experienced its third round of layoffs, eliminating 17 paid positions in the newsroom in July of 2011. *The Times-Picayune* currently puts news staff on furloughs in slow news periods of the year. As the legislative session came to a close at the end of June, both reporters went on furlough for the summer. As of May 2012, reports emerged that the paper is

eliminating daily publication, will print three days a week, and will reduce salaries and paid staff to accommodate a transition to a primarily Web-based news content system.

In the Louisiana state capitol, the press bureaus are downsizing. *The Times-Picayune* had a bureau staff of four, but now has two. *The Advocate* is down from a staff of six to five. The Associated Press (AP) once had two wire reporters on site at the capitol, but now has one full-time reporter and a seasonal helper. Gannett, owner of five regional papers in Louisiana, now maintains one reporter to produce copy for all papers, with the help of AP subscriptions to help fill the news hole. In Virginia, Gannett and Media General papers in different parts of the state share news coverage in order to fill demand while having small presences in the state capital.

In light of salary stagnation and fluctuation in job security, individuals once part of the press corps are now making the transition to other fields. Many of the PIOs interviewed in this study began their careers as journalists covering state government. Kevin Baskins covered state government and politics for Mason City, Iowa, before making the shift to public information at The Iowa Department of Natural Resources in 1998. Marie Centanni left her dream job, covering the Louisiana State Capitol for WAFB to work for Governor Kathleen Blanco, and now works as a freelance media consultant and lobbyist for groups and individuals with ties to Louisiana state government and politics.

This trend persists, as Jan Moller left his position at *The Time-Picayune's* capitol bureau at the end of this summer of 2011 for a position with The Louisiana Budget Project, a nonprofit group dedicated to enacting policy in Louisiana that benefits the state's poor and moderate-income residents. Moller took the time to elaborate on the topic in a recent e-mail:

The decision to leave *The Times-Picayune*--and a 20-year career in daily journalism--was not easy, and only time will tell if it was the right one. Several factors, both professional and personal, led to me pursue this job after being contacted:

New challenges. I know how to cover the state Capitol and produce daily copy. But I've never built a budget, raised money, managed a staff, given public presentations, and been a policy advocate or the public face of an organization. This job lets me use a specific knowledge base--my understanding of the state budget--and apply it to a whole new set of skills.

New family. Our daughter was born in early September. This job gets me home at 5:30 [p.m.] instead of 7:30 [p.m.], and the next time a Cat[egory] 3 hurricane bears down on Baton Rouge I will evacuate with my family instead of hunkering down at the state OEP [Office of Emergency Preparedness].

The decline of newspapers. I loved every minute at *The Times-Picayune*, but three years of staff reductions, pay freezes and forced furloughs took their toll. While I was never in any danger of being laid off (at least that I know of), I also saw little chance of advancing through the newspaper's shrinking ranks despite my fairly modest career goals. And I worried that the industry-wide financial chaos will not subside once the recession ends as readers continue to abandon the print product for the Internet. At age 42, I have at least 25 more years in the workforce and this seemed like a golden opportunity to transition into something new. (January 11, 2012)

Journalists who leave the profession before they are asked to leave do so because of the economic stability new opportunities provide, not because they no longer enjoy the work. The consequences from this transition are fewer skilled reporters covering state government, and a continued loss of contextual knowledge and institutional history, weakening the depth and quality of news coverage. At the state government level, the same trends in the economic decline that scholars like McChesney (1999; McChesney & Nichols, 2010) and Bagdikian (2004) cautioned against are present and reducing the number of journalists serving as watchdogs.

Local television and radio presence in state capitol coverage is also sparse. In the three states researched, there was only one dedicated statehouse reporter: Adam Rhew, statehouse reporter for NBC 29 in Charlottesville, Virginia. The reason he was able to maintain such a unique presence is because the station had carved a niche market for good statewide political coverage, and therefore it became common practice for policy makers and politicians to include NBC 29 on a regular basis. Rhew had this to offer about his position:

I have the dubious distinction of being the last television reporter in Virginia to be based full-time at the state legislature so I really take that mantle seriously in the sense that I'm the only TV reporter here year round. Our station has carved out a niche as showing that that is important. I really take that seriously. And really, you know, believe that our viewers care about what is happening down here. I think given all of the limitations, we've still done an excellent job, and I think that the station deserves a lot of praise for even in tight budget times when other larger stations were closing their bureaus here at the statehouse, it was a clear priority for our management to maintain a bureau here, and to maintain a presence at the state capitol. I think that's paid off in a big way for the station in terms of reputation. (August 23, 2011)

Rhew's was a one-man operation, meaning he had to handle his own shooting, editing, and writing. However, he was one of the few regular capitol-specific television reporters. Regrettably, Rhew left the position shortly after this interview for another position, meaning no full-time television reporters cover the Virginia state legislature. Ryan Nobles is the only other reporter who covers state government and politics as a primary function of his work responsibilities at NBC 12 in Richmond, Virginia. His focus is not confined to state politics, but his position exists for the same reason Rhew's did, it fills a market demand for news content.

While there is a substantial reduction in the talent and, in some cases, in the output of news organizations on the topic of state government, there is no reduction in the amount of content needed on a daily basis from news departments in print, television, and radio. To overcome losses in manpower, interviewees are expanding responsibilities beyond traditional beats to accommodate losses and maintain output. Instead of covering one subject area like the environment, commerce, or the Governor's office, journalists in smaller bureaus or one-person operations are dividing the body of government news between two reporters, or prioritizing news coverage on a daily basis. Interviewees as a group noted two major problem with this kind of breadth of coverage or prioritization. The first problem is that reporters no longer have the ability to focus intently on one or two daily stories. The second problem is that journalists are now

being asked to cover subject matter where they have no contextual knowledge. This contributes to delays in coverage and greater errors in newsgathering as a product of contextual ignorance.

Another product of downsizing is a loss of resources, which creates pragmatic limitations to the quality of coverage of state governments that journalists can provide. When replacing news staff, news directors and editors now hire new reporters to keep salaries down. They are replacing veteran reporters who have strong contextual knowledge and experience with naïve reporters who need time to develop contextual knowledge and contacts within state government. Marie Centanni, a former reporter at WAFB in Baton Rouge, noted that she started covering the legislature after working in the federal government, a graduate degree in political science, and three years of reporting experience. Darin Mann, a former radio reporter at Louisiana Radio Network, stated that it would have been impossible to call a television station in Baton Rouge 10 years ago and apply for a job without five years of experience. The consensus among interviewees is that this decline in experience and knowledge presents a definite threat to the quality of news coverage, and another means by which state government news coverage is failing in a fourth estate role (Cook, 2005; Hulteng & Nelson, 1971).

In addition to losses in reporting talent, news organizations are losing talent behind the camera. For television reporters, staff reductions means less videographers and cameramen and a greater prevalence of one-man-band reporters, who handle all of their own filming, writing, and editing, meaning they have less time to focus on the writing and the depth of coverage they would have had in the past. Several interviewees noted having difficulty repairing or replacing damaged or worn out equipment, reducing their practical capacity to cover stories.

One critical resource journalists have lost is the time to effectively pursue stories. In the process of making up for smaller news staffs, interviewees all expressed frustrations about the



lost ability to really dig into daily stories to verify facts and to see if there is a better angle that tells the story behind an event or announcement. Several interviewees who work in television news noted that the effort to compete in a 24-hour news cycle by expanding the number of daily newscasts at their station have shrunk deadlines in a manner that weakens their ability to thoroughly vet news stories in the manner they once did.

Contributing to the loss of time to work is the addition of cross-platform reporting at print and broadcast organizations. Once dedicated to print or broadcast platforms, journalists are increasingly entering the field or adapting to the practices of producing print and video content that can be published, broadcast, or posted on the Web. The addition of cross-platform reporting requires greater immediacy in coverage, reducing the ability to focus on specific stories and monitor beats for news. Jim Shannon of WAFB expressed that he would benefit from the station hiring staff to manage digital content and material not pertaining to the nightly newscasts.

These findings are consistent with the research of McChesney and Nichols (2010), as well as Singer (2010) which all state that loss of manpower, loss of resources, and expanded responsibilities has negative consequences for reporters and citizens. Fewer reporters attempting to cover more stories at a faster pace than ever is contributing to weaker coverage of state governments and an inability of reporters to fill their fourth estate role in reporting on government in the effort to hold it more accountable. In sum, the impact of economic decline is leading journalists to fail in their shared responsibility of co-creating an enlightened citizenry by performing rigorous coverage and holding state governments accountable.

As a consequence of the loss in time and resources, journalists need to fill additional gaps in newsgathering on a daily basis. Journalists openly acknowledge that PIOs who have a strong grasp of institutional knowledge and context are particularly useful in helping them overcome

these deficiencies. Institutional knowledge can also be a means of verifying information that the journalist is trying to follow up on, or a strong point of reference to build knowledge. Richard Doak was a veteran reporter who covered the Iowa state legislature for 42 years with *The Des Moines Register*. He had this to say on the subject of PIOs:

From a reporter's point of view, the best PIOs are those who supply the facts you're looking for and put you in contact with the right official if an interview is needed. The best PIOs know almost everything about their agencies and are an encyclopedia of facts, but they remain out of the limelight and let the agency officials do the talking. (August 5, 2011)

While accessibility to the decision-makers is essential, there are times where a PIO's membership in the decision-making group of an agency will facilitate media relations as well. While many journalists bristle at the idea of a PIO serving as a spokesperson, there are situations when a reporter is receptive to a PIO that has experience and is at the center of agency decision-making. Dave Yepsen was the chief political columnist for *The Des Moines Register* and had three decades of experience before leaving the job for his current position in 2009. He notes the potential value of PIOs when they possess this knowledge:

I see this in political press secretaries--the best ones are the ones who have good access to their bosses and are also in on the decision-making. Access to your boss is one thing, but meaningful access, someone who is in on the decisions when they get made, I think those are people who are most useful because they can speak to what went into a decision, what the pluses were; what the minuses were. You know, typically, I have just always found in both parties, and no matter what I'm doing, people who are the most useful public information people are those who are in on the decision because they can best explain what is going on--agency or a campaign or a department or something. And I think too, they also keep that agency or department from doing stupid things in the first place. (July 8, 2011)

Journalists that lack context need translators, too. Steve Szkotak is a wire reporter for the Associated Press (AP) in Richmond, Virginia. Steve has 20 years of wire experience with the AP and United Press International (UPI), as well as better than 10 years of experience at local newspapers. Given the increasing time and content demands on reporters across a wide spectrum

of news topics, Szkotak notes the value of a PIO who can communicate the nuances of complex material efficiently to journalists on tight deadlines that are trying to build an accurate context behind a story:

A lot of times, if we are dealing with a highly complicated court case for instance, I mean, you know, I want someone to be able to hold my hand with it, and tell me what the story is, what this means, you know, give me kind of an honest evaluation of what the story is. So you know, for me a lot of times it's just getting my head around something, and to make sure that I'm taking the right approach on it. (August 23, 2011)

For Szkotak, PIOs who know the agency they represent and can help break complex information down in an honest and clear manner is essential. Michelle Milhollon is a capitol bureau reporter for *The Advocate*. She explains that at times, a PIO with contextual knowledge that can help make sense of complex information efficiently is of great help in reporting on a story while on deadline:

PIOs who are well versed on their subject area are a tremendous resource. Health care is a great example. It's very complicated with complex funding formulas and a lot of industry terms for programs. PIOs who can cut through all of that and give me the bottom line are very helpful because that's what I'm trying to do for the readers. (June 17, 2011)

In addition to helping fill gaps in knowledge about specific agencies, journalists appreciate PIOs who fulfill their obligations as public servants and provide access to authoritative sources and information in an open manner. Marsha Shuler, a capitol bureau reporter with *The Advocate*, is a journalist with more than 30 years of experience covering state government in Louisiana. She offered a very strong opinion about what role PIOs should fill when offering opinions or being the face for an organization on an issue. Shuler said:

I mean, what the PIO thinks! The [PIOs who] are the best ones in my mind that help me do my job better, and help me get the news to the readers and all on my terms, where I can ask questions, follow-up questions. I find that the best ones that I've dealt with through the years have been that facilitator who helps me do my job better. Now if he's trying to find some facts or something, or a report that somebody is going to direct me toward, that's fine. But when I want to talk to [someone] on issues, policy, I want the guy; I want somebody that's an authority. If it's [the] Medicaid program; I want the

director of the Medicaid program. If it's somebody that deals with nursing home licensing, I want the somebody that deals with the nursing home licensing. The ones that have been the best through the years have been that way. (July 1, 2011)

Journalists are looking for the information, but they do not want any kind of alteration, analysis, or input from the PIO on the subject, unless they are asking for it. When they want to talk policy decisions, they want to talk with the decision-makers. This is in keeping with literature on source credibility and newsgathering (Mindich, 1998; Schiller, 1981). Being a critical part of the administrative team helps PIOs have more credibility with journalists.

Hand in hand with accessibility is whether or not PIOs are responsive in a timely manner. Peter Frost notes the need for responsiveness, "Sure, access [is] number one. Responsiveness; if I need a question answered in half an hour, I expect at least a phone call back to say, 'I am not going to have it for you right now,' or 'Here's what I've got.' That's a big issue. Sometimes I will call, and I won't get a response for two days, and in this business, that is unacceptable" (August 12, 2011).

PIOs on site in the legislature and out in the field are tethered to mobile devices, constantly looking at the e-mails and texts are coming through. Journalists are aware that PIOs have mobile technology, and it has raised their expectations. Jim Shannon comments on the use of mobile devices, and how it impacts his perception of a PIO on the job in terms of responsiveness and timeliness, "And in the ones--that have the BlackBerry, or this or that, they're [communicating]. Some of them are doing it two-handed. They got it; they know what's going on. The old-school ones--they're going to [get] left behind" (June 20, 2011).

Responsiveness is not limited to giving journalists the information. It also involves PIOs' ability to communicate throughout their effort to fill a media request. In situations where PIOs are going to take more time to respond, even if it will not be well-received, journalists appreciate

PIOs who will be responsive. Melinda Deslatte notes the importance of responsiveness, even when a PIO needs more time or cannot getting access to the principles:

If you don't have an answer to my question, shoot me an e-mail or return a phone call saying, "I can't answer that question; I don't know how to answer that question; we are not allowed to answer that question," whatever the basic logistics are. I may not be thrilled with the response, but I will be much happier to get a response as opposed to letting it just hang out in ether with no response and no common respect to bother to answer the question. (June 28, 2011)

PIOs that apply principles of norms and routines to the practice of media relations are successfully establishing themselves as reliable resources for journalists in providing information and access in a timely fashion, which helps journalists overcome their practical challenges while coping with economic decline. These findings are in accordance with Broom, Casey, and Ritchey's (2000) transactional definition of relationships, in which relationships are built and maintained by fulfilling a purpose for each of public one interacts with.

By adhering to journalistic norms and routines, PIOs help journalists be more efficient in newsgathering and production. This finding is in keeping with previous research that found those that attend to journalistic practices are perceived to be useful among journalists, and have stronger working relationships with journalists (Howard, 2004; Sallot & Johnson, 2006). It also supports Bruning and Ledingham's (2007) approach of applying RMT to media relations.

Through the lens of social network theory, the negative impact on newsgathering has both positive and negative influences on the ability of PIOs and journalists to build strong working relationships. On one hand, the journalists' loss of time to focus on specific stories and to devote attention to familiarizing themselves with PIOs and other sources act as a source of closure, minimizing the ability of PIOs to broker relationships with journalists through experience over time. On the other hand, PIOs can use journalistic norms and routines as a force

of brokerage, by establishing a reputation for providing useful material consistently over time. Both of these findings are in keeping with Burt's (1992, 2000, 2005) forces of closure and brokerage, or factors that inhibit or help build working relationships, respectively.

Journalists, however, do not blindly rely on PIOs in every situation or only on PIOs. Jim Shannon explains that while many of his good friends are PIOs, they are still, "paid flag-carriers" (June 20, 2011). Shannon approaches PIOs from a default position of skeptic because of his commitment to watchdog journalism. Shannon, therefore, will always take the input of PIOs cautiously and verify it with another source before running with it, or run with a story without contacting a PIO at all. During his interview, Shannon explained that most commonly, his story ideas come from sources not working out of the communications offices of agencies, showing the researcher a text message he received from an assistant district attorney that morning explaining they were making an arrest in a local case. Experienced journalists seek information from sources other than PIOs first. Veteran reporters like Marsha Shuler make the point that doing an end around on a PIO is not only a tool for those situations, but a mark of a good reporter vigorously pursuing a story. The need for verification and story accuracy drives a reporter to seek validation and cross validation from credible sources, keeping with early literature on norms and routines (Fishman, 1990; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). Thus, a reporter will use circumvention as a means of testing the trustworthiness of a PIO or source. If a PIO is going to lie when confronted with verified facts, she knows she cannot trust them. It is, therefore, incumbent on a PIO to use candor when dealing with reporters, because any evasion or deception will damage their source relationship with reporters on the beat in the long run.

These examples demonstrate forces of closure on the ability of PIOs to broker working relationships with journalists. Burt (2005) explains that shared values among individuals within a

social network act as forces of closure, limiting the access of outside individuals to build contacts within the network. Similarly, journalists possess professional values of objectivity and skepticism, which limit the ability of PIOs to form strong bonds with members of the professional networks that are state government press corps. By striving to maintain professional detachment and strong scrutiny to enhance journalistic credibility, journalists are limiting the ability of PIOs to form the symbiotic relationships that Sallot and Johnson (2006) suggested, or the weak ties that Granovetter (1973) and Burt (2005) suggested.

Several characteristics limit the ability of journalists to circumvent PIOs. Journalists with a high level of experience and knowledge of state government are less comfortable with relying solely on PIOs, as past experiences strengthens skepticism of the practices of PIOs. The more reporters identify with their watchdog role on a given story, the less likely they will be to rely on PIOs for fear of being manipulated or deceived. Finally, the ability to circumvent PIOs depends on the amount of access journalists have to alternative trusted information sources. Weaker contextual knowledge and smaller source pools in economic decline mean greater reliance on PIOs to help manage daily demands. This finding is in keeping with the work of public relations scholars who identified the reasons why journalists are becoming more reliant on public relations practitioners (Howard, 2004; Ledingham & Bruning, 2007; Sallot and Johnson, 2006).

In addition to relying more on PIOs to help fill demand, journalists are also learning how to collaborate with their colleagues on the beat in managing the breadth of agencies and individuals that fewer reporters must cover. In each of the states researched, interviewees explained that it is common for reporters at sister papers and stations to share stories to help fill content holes on a daily basis. More importantly, journalists at unrelated news organizations will commonly share resources and story notes to help overcome content pressures and meet

deadlines. This is in keeping with the work of Gans (1979), Tuchman (1978), and Singer (2010) who found that beat reporters more commonly collaborate than compete with one another in daily tasks. The reason for this is that print reporters that work on press row are now not competitors with each other, and think of other media conduits in their market as competitors.

Several reporters allude to the challenge of competing with bloggers who lack the experience and credentials of reporters on the beat covering state government on a daily basis. Others note that because there is no print rival within their city or region, they often compete with the local television stations, as is the case between *The Des Moines Register* and KCCI-TV in Des Moines. Others note that national media is at times a source of competition on certain stories. Ryan Nobles at NBC-12 in Richmond, Virginia, notes that competition in the current context comes from alternative sources:

Externally, it's funny who the competition comes from. It could be, you know, from the way the media landscape has changed. It's not just TV stations anymore. You know, there aren't very many other TV stations that are allowing their reporters to do what I have been able to do with politics. There are a couple that I keep an eye on, but mainly I look at other political blogs, newspaper, and partisan blogs too, because they are one of the areas that people are breaking stories to, so I try to keep watch over all of that stuff. (August 9, 2011)

In congress with practical challenges and resource limitations, the work of journalists and their relationships with PIOs are influenced by institutional pressures within news organizations that reporters must negotiate. The following section identifies these pressures, and explains how they impact working relationships with PIOs.

### **4.3 Institutional Pressures**

Economic downturns and the corporatization of news are bringing sales and marketing into the newsroom at an increased rate, which is the first form of institutional pressure on journalists. A prominent example of this is the focus on hyper-localized news coverage. The



push for a local connection is resulting in fewer reporters covering state government, because of its perceived lack of relevance in government news among members of the public and the lack of direct local ties on most stories. The Louisiana state capitol has no television presence on press row, and the Louisiana Radio Network (LRN) office is also empty as well, as they use the Internet to facilitate newsgathering on streaming video. While radio reporters are finding ways to cover the state, they provide a narrow perspective for affiliate radio stations, and one that lacks the direct contact of the reporters working on press row.

The managerial pressures are not as direct as one might assume, as bureau reporters have autonomy from the local newsroom. However, the distance of capitol bureau reporters from the newsroom does have a direct and negative impact on the level of coverage and attention news about state government receives in broadcast and publication. State government is not the primary focus of the papers that are not based in the capital cities in each of the states. The content demands of audiences in home cities create a form of pressure on editors and news managers that limits the prominence and placement of news stories about state government. Ed Anderson of *The Times-Picayune* noted a situation where an important event at the Louisiana Capitol was relegated to the back pages because the editors wanted to run 40 inches on the top half of the fold of the front page about that week's episode of *Treme*, an HBO drama focused on the aftermath and recovery of Katrina. As he puts it, the demand for news and its placement is driven by how well a reporter can fit, "how far we fell and how far we have come" in story ideas (June 27, 2011).

Anderson's example validates the claims of other journalism scholars that internal pressure from management to maintain or grow audiences are weakening the level of discourse on government and civic issues in news content (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 1999;

McChesney & Nichols, 2010). In their efforts to manage growing practical and institutional pressures to maintain audiences, journalists are no longer able to maintain a fourth estate role with the same rigor. This means that internal pressures to attend to perceived audience demand is weakening journalists' role in informing the citizenry. This finding supports the argument of Pointdexter, Heider, and McCombs (2006) that commercial interests are having a chilling effect on journalists seeking to fill a watchdog role in news.

Others note a similar frustration, but have a rational perspective that journalism is a for-profit business, and that means generating content that fits the demands of the public. Julian Walker, a reporter with *The Virginian-Pilot* who works out of a Richmond bureau, notes that news judgment carries an implied attention to what kinds of stories draw attention:

I think that ultimately everybody is just like, "I have a job for the newspaper, and my job at the newspaper is to get that piece of information that is going to attract eyeballs and is going to move the dial." As I said, that is going to get our click rate up, that's going to be a story that's going to generate traffic, and perhaps get linked by other aggregators. I don't have that as my marching orders, but I think that that--I think if you are a thinking person, you realize that is part of the equation, and that is part of the evaluation of what is a successful operation.

As you know newspapers are still trying to figure out exactly how they derive real profits from online. But I can certainly say, and this is not specific to the newspaper I'm currently at, I mean, other newspapers I've worked at have done the same thing. They give their staff some kind of indication of, "These are the stories that were most read; this is what our traffic is this day which compares favorably or unfavorably to our traffic on this date a week ago," or a month ago, or whatever it is. So all of those metrics are tracked, and you have to realize that and function accordingly.

Now that's not to say, and I don't want to give you any kind of misapprehension that I'm told [by my editor or management] or I'm given instructions implicitly or explicitly that say, "You need to do this story because that's the kind of story that will generate clicks," because it's not like that. We certainly are free to exercise our news judgment, and that's been the case everywhere, but as I said I think that most reporters are probably aware that it is also key to kind of have content that is going to draw readers in. (August 16, 2011)

So, while it is a source of frustration, journalists are intuitively negotiating the dynamic

of what people want to read while covering substantive stories about state government. While the implicit demand for state government content with a local connection is strong, most reporters reaffirm that generally, most managers will back the efforts of their reporters in coverage.

Walker expresses a point of view that mirrors most of his colleagues:

I've never had a boss that I didn't feel like backed me. I think for most people in this industry they view journalism as a calling, and as such try to, I mean, that's not to say if you do something stupid or reckless, you're going to pay for it, but I mean, I think in as much as they are called upon to defend their people from critics who may have a partisan bent or some other kind of agenda, so long as it's not. If you screw a story, or you got a fact error or something like that, I mean, that's one thing. But if it's just somebody that has a gripe because they don't feel like they got the coverage they want, all of those cases, it's been like, "Sorry." (August 16, 2011)

The pressure from the sales department is stronger at some news organizations than at others, particularly those struggling in their news market. Sonya Heitshusen at WHO-TV in Des Moines, a consistent 2nd-place finisher to rival KCCI-TV for 50 years, notes that she's seen an ever-growing presence of the sales department in news content in broadcast television in general, while stressing that this is not the policy of WHO-TV. Heitshusen's assertion seems to suggest there is some indication struggling news organizations are letting the sales department dictate more policy in the newsroom than in the past. This lends credibility to scholars' concerns about corporatized media and the growing influence of advertising and corporate dollars on the quality of news content (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney & Nichols, 2010; Singer, 2005).

Pressure within the newsroom from management and editors because of a reporter's approach to coverage of prominent figures is not commonly a problem for the interviewees.

Rhew of NBC 29 had this to say of his management in Charlottesville:

One thing I can safely say that I genuinely respect about our management is that I've never once been told not to cover something or to cover something because of any sort of push-back or anything like that, and I've certainly done stories that have not made people happy. They've given me free reign to do what I need to do; part of that I think is because they trust me to be fair and accurate, and I've certainly developed the reputation that if I

report on something it's going to be a fair story. (August 23, 2011)

Rhew's indication that news management is still supportive of the autonomy of their reporters to aggressively investigate the practices of government agencies and officials is encouraging and supportive of Gans's (1979) argument that management and editorial pressures are low on the newsgathering process of journalists. Gans's prophetic indication that economic downturn could change this did see some support.

One example, illustrates that some officials are prominent enough to induce pressure from news management on journalists. During Governor Bobby Jindal's first election campaign, he received *The Times-Picayune's* endorsement. Capitol bureau reporters have on occasion been contacted by the editors to go easier on Jindal in some situations because they had endorsed him, and worry about the conflict it would create. Ed Anderson offered the following perspective:

To editors down there, editorial writers, to the publisher, Jindal could do no wrong. No matter how badly your capitol bureau is getting whipped up, beaten, and denigrated by the press people, Jindal could do no wrong. Not the editorial board so much as the daily editing process and the publisher. The editorial board every now and then will get up on its haunches, but you know, it's like they are almost afraid. I've had quotes excised from stories that were critical to the administration. It's a well-founded point! Because that's our guy; we endorsed him! And we can do it again. (June 27, 2011)

Anderson's comments are indicative that in situations where prominent political figures are widely popular, management may feel the need to pressure journalists to avoid highly critical reporting for fear it may negatively impact their audience and advertising dollars. This provides further validation of the arguments of norms and routines scholars that economic declines are inducing greater pressure on journalists to avoid aggravating prominent individuals and organizations with ties to the news ownership (McChesney & Nichols, 2010; Picard, 2008).

Practical and economic pressures are contributing to a generational push for different objectives in news coverage and a managerial pressure on journalists in their approach to

newsgathering. Interviewees indicate that within the past five years producers have stressed that journalists emphasize get it first over getting it right. This finding supports Singer's (2010) argument that convergence is weakening rigor in newsgathering. Jim Shannon of WAFB offered a strong example of this trend in his experience. The event was on-site news coverage of a murder suicide that took place at the T. J. Ribs restaurant in Baton Rouge in June. Shannon said:

Friday afternoon there was a shooting at T. J. Ribs. I'm standing there and we are getting ready to go on the air, and there is this kid from Channel 2, this blond-haired girl, and she's, "I'm getting him first!" and I'm like, "Fine."

She interviews the PIO from the police department, L. J. McNeal, and so he's through with her, and they're coming to me, and we have a few moments, and he says, "One of the victims is a coroner's officer. Now I am not going to confirm that, but I'm just going to tell you it is." I said, "Okay, all right, gotcha." She does her live shot. She got him first!

So they're coming at me and him, and so I'm like, "Okay, what do you got? Two people shot and two people killed. That's it; that's it; that's it." Thank you, Gina; and he walks off, and I said, "Now I'm told that one of the dead people is a coroner's deputy. Now at this point we don't know if it's the shooter or the victim, but one of the dead people is one of the coroner's people." I can sit there, and I did it; I said it on the air. I said, "This is one of those things that we can tell you that is not going to be confirmed by the police," and he had walked off. He had already walked off when I started saying that, and he knew it was true. He was just giving me a nice big fat bone that the dumbass [reporter] didn't get.

"I want to be first; I want to be first!" . . . My boss was like, "Dude, the coroner's connection! That was great! How did you get that?" I said, "Just by standing there [and] keeping my mouth shut."

That's a relationship with a PIO that I've got ten years and she's got two weeks or three weeks, whatever it is. And he's going to drop that little nugget. He's knows I'm not going to [say], "Baton Rouge Police tell me." (June 20, 2011)

Shannon illustrates the impact of being patient and working sources in improving the quality of the newsgathering for a reporter. The relative inexperience and rush of the younger reporter led to a situation where she missed a key story element that would have enhanced her coverage. These errors also create problems in verification and accuracy in reporting. Shannon

went on to suggest that it is the attention to detail that is consistently missing from most young producers and reporters who are more focused on getting it first rather than getting it right.

Shannon's example also supports contemporary norms and routines literature on the conflict between maintaining economic prosperity, efficiency, and performing the quality of journalism seen in past generations (Cushion & Lewis, 2009; McChesney & Nichols, 2010; Singer, 2010). More importantly, it is indicative of a generational difference in fundamental values that are now emerging in both journalists and their news management. As time progresses and the veteran reporters continue to leave journalism or retire, it appears that the quality of journalism is only destined to decline if economics and immediacy continue to be the primary concerns. This means the journalists will grow even weaker in their shared role of co-creating an enlightened citizenry. With the strongest examples of internal pressures shaping news coverage identified, the next section will identify the impact of state centralization of communication on newsgathering in Louisiana and the working relationships between PIOs and journalists.

#### **4.4 Centralization of Communication**

Louisiana Governor Jindal's press staff and press row have been engaged in a rather terse media relationship since he took office in his first term in 2007. The strategic approach employed is one of message centralization and closed channels. When a message is disseminated to the media, it is done at a strategic point in time, across all pertinent agencies, and in a manner where the same message content is disseminated by all parties involved. Mentioned previously, the goal is to minimize news leaks and dissenting perspectives within the administration appearing in the media. By controlling the message that gets to the public through the media, the state government is trying to shape public opinion.

Unfortunately, it also has the effect of creating antagonistic relationships with journalists for several reasons. Centralization thins the numbers of independent sources within state government with which a reporter can talk about a story. If all of the sources are saying the exact same thing, journalists cannot offer a news story that considers a diverse set of perspectives from authoritative sources. Worse yet, some PIOs simply ignore related media queries.

Journalists in Louisiana approach PIOs from a default position of a skeptic grounded in the news values of watchdog journalism (Gans, 1979; Mindich, 1998). In cases of high centralization, journalists develop negative perceptions about PIOs and their agencies. Jim Shannon refers to PIOs as a “necessary evil” and that the PIO’s job is to keep a journalist’s attention diverted from the whole story (June 20, 2011). George Sells echoes this sentiment in sharing his perspective on PIOs and some of his remarks to young colleagues on what they should do when they get on site:

[PIOs] can “control” the outflow of news, and they can control it exactly like [organizations] want it. We got to a point, I think it was in Detroit; I told our reporters, “When you go out there,” well, first of all a PIO wouldn’t be there at first, “get as much as you can on your own like the old-time reporters. The old guys with porkpie hats and the cigars. Get as much as you can, and you will probably get a lot more than you’re going to get from the PIO.” (June 29, 2011)

A prime example of skepticism is how the press corps in the Louisiana State Capitol perceives the Governor’s Press Office in the current administration, and even to an extent in the Blanco administration. Message centralization and control is seen as a means of hindering journalists in the role as members of the fourth estate, trying to hold state government accountable on policy decisions and other practices. The agencies most critical to Governor Jindal’s policy initiatives all are quite effective at falling into lock-step with the Governor on talking points, and no one freely speaks from experience on matters, for fear that he will

marginalize or fire them. Ed Anderson expressed the nature of the working relationship with Governor Jindal and his staff:

I say that because the Jindal Administration has made it very hard to deal with, I'm the kind of guy that does not have a filter. I'm very straightforward. Jindal Administration is very controlling--I know this sounds pejorative, but they have an agenda and they want to get it across. There is no dialogue. I'm usually the only PIO or state agency that they have a dialogue with. "No, this is not exactly what I want. Can I call you back later and we can get together?"

The Jindal Administration is very much about control, and getting their message out. "The heck with what you want. This is our message and this is what we are going to tell you." (June 27, 2011)

Jordan Blum, a reporter tasked with covering higher education in Louisiana, works out of the capitol bureau for *The Advocate* in Louisiana. In our interview, he offered an example of how ingrained message control for political gain is:

If you're talking about the Jindal Administration, they like to funnel everything as much as they can through a single path, have a single voice . . . To sit down to have a conversation with him, and you think, "That was a pretty good interview," and then you go and look--Ah, very little here. (July 1, 2011)

Another critical aspect of centralization is that state agencies are more prone to deceptive or obstructionist practices in the communication tactics. During the 2011 legislative session in Louisiana, Governor Jindal vetoed a popular cigarette tax that helped provide health care for state residents as part of his pledge not to raise any taxes for citizens in the state. Rather than openly announce the veto when it took place on a Friday morning, Jindal's communication office held the release until Monday night the following week and released it at 6:45 p.m., after they believed no print or televised media would be following the story or checking for releases.

The press corps, however, was prepared to respond aggressively to the deceptive approach of the Governor's communication office. Michelle Milhollon of *The Advocate* found a 250-page report released by Bobby Jindal in 1996 when he was serving as the director of the



Department of Health and Hospitals. In the report, he endorsed the same four-cent tax he sought to veto. At 7:03 p.m. Monday night, Milhollon posted a story to *The Advocate's* capitol bureau blog, covering the Governor's veto and statement, while also discussing that he was now opposing something he once endorsed in a 250-page report detailing how the tax would help Louisiana's residents. At the end of the blog post, Milhollon attached an electronic copy of the document for all interested readers. The week following, the legislature held an override vote in the House on the cigarette tax, and no fewer than two dozen legislators spoke, quoting Jindal's document on-the-record for posterity. Obstructing reporters on a major story invited much more aggressive, negative coverage and blowback in the public and with other elected officials.

In Governor Jindal's case, negative responses from journalists and legislators is a small concern, as his political career in Louisiana is secure. This supports Pinto's (2008, 2009) work that suggests political popularity in the public weakens journalists' ability to be critical because of market pressures. Ed Anderson, however, believes that Jindal will have problems if his aspirations are national. When national reporters try to learn about a newcomer, it is common for them to contact local reporters familiar with the individual. Anderson is certain that he and his colleagues will take the opportunity to share what they have and cannot use locally to ensure Jindal is examined by national journalists who are unaffected by the same institutional pressures and local politics. In short, more centralized communication strategies lead to more antagonistic working relationships between PIOs and journalists, and negatively impacts the reputations of governments and elected officials. The approach of the governor's office and the response by Milhollon and Anderson supports the findings of Ryan and Martinson (1988), which indicate that deceptive practices from public relations practitioners arouse antagonism and often result in strained working relationships, more negative coverage, and long-term damage to reputations.

Thus, it is critical for PIOs to work over time to prove they are interested in filling the role of an information broker for journalists, rather than a barrier from the truth. Some of this is beginning from a position of candor, but the true measure is a fair practice of answering questions, working to meet needs, and doing so in an honest and fair manner over time, even in situations where the practical elements of the job do not permit a PIO to effectively facilitate the needs of a journalist. A state that puts emphasis on accountability over centralization offers evidence of the difference an open approach to media relations can create.

Iowa has a much more open communication policy with news media. Mentioned before, Governor Branstad has pushed several forms of communication initiatives that promoted transparency of government, ranging from media policies to how the Web sites are organized to meet public needs. Most journalists in Iowa expressed that they now feel the current administration is better about communicating with them. However, PIOs will never be able to totally earn the respect and trust of every reporter. Veteran reporters still remain somewhat skeptical and express a sense of “nausea” at the political buzz word “transparency.”

Centralization of communication in state governments acts as a force of closure between PIOs and journalists (Burt, 1992, 2000, 2005). Practitioners that are restricted in their ability to open dialogue with journalists are unable to best meet the needs of journalists, weakening their ability to maximize their utility to reporters and trustworthiness over time. Making matters worse, administrative pressures to obstruct or deceive journalists create opportunities to provide examples of abuse that destroy the basis for building trust with reporters, in general.

Centralization activates greater skepticism (Gans, 1979) and a desire to maintain professional detachment (Mindich, 1998) among journalists. From a social network standpoint, centralization is an example of the institutional pressures from members of PIO networks that

serve to inhibit the brokerage process of PIOs with journalists (Burt, 2005). With the effects of centralization discussed, the conversation now shifts from centralization of communication to the impact of technology on journalism and working relationships.

#### **4.5 Impact of Technology**

A relatively new element, but a constant for each of the interviewees is integrating social and digital media into their daily practice. One benefit they provide is a means of expediting newsgathering. Melinda Deslatte, an AP wire reporter at the Louisiana Capitol press bureau notes that she became an avid user of Twitter to aid in tracking what legislators and other reporters were working on throughout the day, facilitating her ability to follow sources. Multiple reporters noted the ability to use Facebook as a means of crowd-sourcing, or polling their followers for story ideas on slow news days, or to find sources with experience relating to a story they are covering on a given day. Social and digital media are also becoming a regular means of promotion and marketing. The majority of interviewees are now also utilizing social and digital media as a means of promoting their stories or their colleagues' stories as well as other off-the-cuff or more opinionated posts about what they are witnessing that will not make the story.

Deslatte even noted that there are times when Twitter postings on her part are a means of building good will with other journalists, state employees, and PIOs as they were of assistance to them in their daily business, suggesting that social and digital media may have functionality for facilitating symbiotic relationships with PIOs, colleagues, and sources. Moller referenced Twitter as a conduit for some of his snarky comments, and as a way of engaging in give-and-take with sources and PIOs in cultivating the story until they develop the finished product:

There's a snark factor. You try to be a little bit [wittier] and don't always succeed, but sometimes you get pushed back. Like, you will get push-backs from the person you're tweeting about or the agency you're tweeting about, so there will be a little bit more

communication leading up to the print condition product as they try to shape up when they kind of see where you are going with the story. (June 28, 2011)

These findings validate the work of Ahmad (2010), who argues that social and digital media are providing means of helping journalists expand their ability to report and gather information on a more rapid news cycle. The relative uniformity of social and digital media's application among reporters in all three states studied also validates Ahmad's (2010) argument that use is growing more prevalent among journalists and news organizations for reporting and promotion in an effort to maximize audience and combat economic losses.

Blogging is also a means for more immediate news postings, and when cross-referenced with Facebook and Twitter, serve as a means of effectively pulling attention to the post. Moller and Anderson of *The Times-Picayune* both referenced the blogging strategy of "Four in Five." They cover various stories throughout each day in the legislature, then get back to their desk or lab top, and produce four paragraphs of the most essential story elements just covered within five minutes after leaving the news event.

I want to say "between four and five" were the buzz words we got last year. Four paragraphs in five minutes when there was something really newsworthy, you know, jump in that blog, get it up there, and get it out the door. In some ways it can be helpful in organizing your thinking. I'm always amazed at how much the lead that I punch out just off the top of my head and you know the first couple of graphs looks incredibly similar to the product that I've had 45 minutes or an hour to really think about and craft. Nine times out of ten, they are going to look substantially similar. (June 28, 2011)

That blog post, however, is not where the story ends for the reporters who are now blogging in addition to producing copy for the print edition for the next day. Blogs are now becoming a means of verification throughout the course of a news day between the reporters and their sources at state agencies. Reporters at both *The Advocate* and *The Times-Picayune* noted that their initial blog posts serve as stepping off points with their sources, where PIOs will now consistently read blog posts, call them if anything appears to be inaccurate or misrepresentative

of the agency or their principals, and the journalist can engage in some give-and-take to enhance the quality of the story before it goes to press that evening. The prevalence of blogging among professional journalists in Louisiana, Iowa, and Virginia provides support for the work of Singer (2005, 2010), who made the case that blogging is a more popular information source among consumers, and that content creators are striving to assert professional values and practices in providing content on blogs.

While social and digital media seem beneficial, the criticisms of what social and digital media are doing to newsgathering are strong, too. The majority of journalists note that the demand to fill content is ever-expanding, and only further exacerbates their ability to focus on producing quality news. They wish they had time to focus on not only verification and depth of coverage, but also some idle time to work their sources over the phone for story ideas and other details that might lead to news stories no one picks up on in the rush. Grant Schulte, formerly of *the Des Moines Register* and currently with the Lincoln, Nebraska bureau of the AP, makes a good summarization in thinking about work demand and the impact it can have on the time available to a reporter:

I mean, there were obviously--there's a new push for technology, and so there was a lot of [work] in addition to staffing cuts. There was a lot of blogging, and [managing] Facebook and Twitter. That actually became a challenge because on one hand you're trying to focus on stories that are about bigger picture and larger things. At the same time, something pops across the wire, and your editor wants you to jump on it right away and you have to blog and tweet and do all this other stuff. Which is fine, but when there are only so many bodies to work, it can eat up your day really quickly. (July 26, 2011)

These findings provide further validation for scholars that suggest journalists are being pulled in too many directions with the loss of staff and shrinking deadlines (Cushion & Lewis, 2009; McChesney & Nichols, 2010). Social and digital media may help facilitate dissemination and

newsgathering, but the majority of journalists also perceive of these tools as yet another conduit they have to negotiate on top of their traditional print or broadcast conduits.

Social and digital media can be a mixed bag that is beneficial for journalists, but also creates additional work to manage on top of the practical challenges already in place. As far as the impact they have on the work relationship with PIOs, this too is a matter of weighing benefits against potential challenges. As PIOs are still adopting social and digital media, they are proving to be a supplemental resource for journalists along with agency Web sites. In the case of the Iowa DOT, the agency staff is making use of their agency Web sites, Facebook, and Twitter to connect with reporters. It is common for local television Web sites to hyperlink to the Iowa DOT Web sites, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds for the latest updates on traffic, construction, and emergency updates in the case of the Missouri River floods in the summer of 2011.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (Iowa DNR) maintains active social and digital media presences. In addition to providing information to citizens and serving as an archival tool for reference, journalists are following the postings on the Iowa DNR's social and digital media specialist on Twitter and Facebook throughout the day. When talking with the Iowa DNR's social and digital media specialist, she mentioned that she's counted 35 reporters from local and national entities following the Iowa DNR on Twitter (July 15, 2011).

Suzanne Hall at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) uses Web-based content servers, as well as social and digital media to help accommodate journalists looking for pictures and archival information at times asynchronous with her work schedule. In her position, having a healthy number of international journalists in different time zones requires a more flexible responsiveness and accessibility than standard work hours might allow. These examples suggest another means by which PIOs are attending to the needs of journalists, enhancing their utility to

the journalists covering their organizations. This provides further support for scholars suggesting that attention to the practices of journalists enhance the quality of working relationships over time (Howard, 2004; Sallot & Johnson, 2006). It also furthers Shin and Cameron's (2003a; 2003b) argument that providing extensive Web-based resources will enhance public relations practitioner utility among journalists covering their organizations. Speaking in terms of social network theory, the strategic application of social and digital media as information resources advance PIOs' goal of building negotiated, productive working relationships with journalists by establishing a reputation for greater utility and credibility, which is a force of brokerage of weak ties (Burt, 2005; Granovetter, 1973).

However, PIOs are beginning to utilize their agency Web sites, as well as social and digital media to actively circumvent the media to gain a direct line to the public, without a media filter. While most journalists did not talk about this a strategic point of avoiding them or offering an alternative news source to their reports, Mark Ballard, the bureau chief for *The Advocate's* capitol bureau, did make the connection when he noted it as a loss for journalists on the monopoly of the gatekeeper's role:

I think that we as reporters have got to understand that this is a new world in which we no longer control the access that we once did. They can go around us, and if they are ruthless and cynical enough--we have to look at it from their perspective. (July 1, 2011)

While Ballard expresses concern about how making use of alternative conduits can remove them from the equation, his colleagues make use of alternative conduits to effectively do their work. Jordan Blum makes use of Twitter and Facebook to track daily happenings and to generate story ideas. Reporters working in news radio and television regularly track streaming video from state legislatures to follow developments and supplement daily coverage of critical news from legislative sessions. While social and digital media can be used at cross-purposes,

they are a possible tool for building symbiotic relationships. The following section addresses the impact of candor and ethics on working relationships.

#### **4.6 A Straightforward Approach**

Candor in approach is something journalists find help them with PIOs over the course of time, and they appreciate it when PIOs maintain it with them. It can be a problem for journalists when they fail to maintain it. Courtney Moyer, who has since departed her position as PIO of the Virginia Department of Rail and Transportation (DRPT), discussed a situation where a reporter came to her with questions about a policy decision her agency came to, and was interested in getting an interview with her administrators about the topic. Moyer spoke with the reporter for 45 minutes and worked to arrange an interview for the reporter, but her administrator's availability was limited the day of the media query. Moyer called the reporter back and left a message, offering potential times for an interview over the course of the next four days, but received no reply from the reporter.

After two weeks with no reply, the story appeared in *The Washington Post*, criticizing the agency and its policies, according to Moyer, and noted that the reporter attempted to reach the agency for comment on the story, but received no comment. Moyer summed up her frustration with the statement:

There are other reporters that I have noticed, that take almost a political stand, that it's very, very frustrating, especially this year with all of the major decisions that our governor has made in terms of not applying for high speed rail, and having it be touted as Democrat vs. Republican. And when you have a reporter come at you. With a clear agenda, and if what you say doesn't meet their agenda, they don't use you. I kind of lose respect for that journalist because to me, that's not your job. (August 25, 2011)

Moyer's situation highlights what PIOs would prefer from journalists when covering a story. PIOs would prefer that journalists consult the agency in some capacity before running a



story. If the PIO is responsive and works to facilitate coverage, then there should be no reason to circumvent the PIO and agency. The majority of PIOs and journalists understand this, and note that it gives agencies a fair opportunity to be a part of the story and put their perspective on-the-record. Journalists that adhere to this approach build trustworthy reputations with PIOs, earning greater accessibility and prompt responses. Applying Burt's (2005) principles of brokerage under social network theory, a journalist can cultivate relationships with PIOs by maintaining an open dialogue with PIOs and their state agencies in advance of a story and by allowing state agencies and members of state government to be able to respond and collaboratively influence news coverage, their reputation, and the issue agenda over time. These practices earn journalists a reputation for fairness and trustworthiness, enhancing source relationships with PIOs and decision-makers in state governments.

For journalists, just as it is with PIOs, it is important to build a strong reputation among PIOs because PIOs talk with one another about reporters they interact with. PIOs in all three states get together in informal social gatherings and talk about work, as well as about the reporters they are being contacted by. In the process, PIOs develop a sense of whether or not they can trust journalists, as well as what the best approach is strategically to meet the needs of each journalist. At the national level, PIOs belong to professional associations that confer with one another about journalists at the local and national level that contact them to learn more about their news angles and their professional reputations. In short, the more straightforward the approach of both parties with one another, the stronger the working relationships become over time. These findings further support Burt and Knez's (1995) brokerage process and how an individual can build his or her reputation in another network by being consistent with all professionals that surround a specific point of contact. Mentioned earlier, consistently meeting

expectations enhance a bridge's reputation (Blau, 1974; Homans, 1961). As PIOs continue to reinforce reporters' reputations for trustworthiness, the specific desired contact will be more receptive to working with reporters that are consistently seen as trustworthy. PIOs can serve as third-party referents to the practices of specific journalists (Burt & Knez, 1995).

Conversely, journalists validated PIOs' expressed need to maintain candor with them under any circumstances and appreciate PIOs that hold their integrity in high regard. Several journalists spoke about counterparts in Louisiana who have quit a job with a state agency because their boss asked them to lie for them, and they refused to damage their work relationship with the journalists. Jan Moller elaborated on the subject of honesty:

My advice would be very simple. Just return your calls quickly and don't lie. Your credibility, I would much rather be told, "I don't know; I will find out," but most reporters, most good reporters have a pretty good bullshit detector, and when you get known as a bullshit artist that takes a long time to recover from, and it may be a fatal blow. (Moller, June 28, 2011).

Bob Johannessen is one example of a professional grounded in public relations and politics who earned the respect of the press corps by maintaining a sense of candor, professionalism, and a balance of personal interface on the job. He prefers face-to-face conversation and honesty to forms of evasion or unethical strategic communication. Several reporters referenced Johannessen when talking about those they can trust, without any solicitation on my part. Former television reporter Avery Davidson had this to say about Johannessen:

I think it's openness and honesty. I'm going to tell you now, the best PIO I ever worked with; it would be Bob Johannessen.

He used to work at the Department of Health and Hospitals, but I never felt like I had to worry about, "Well, is Bob going to shut me down on something," or "Can I NOT go to him with something?" I always felt that there was an open door, and he and I had a great working relationship to where, it got to the point where, if he heard that I was working on something, he would give me a call beforehand.



He was like, “What do you need? Let me get the person you need.” and it was always on deadline. And that’s pretty much what I think makes a good PIO. Being there, understanding the deadline, making sure that the reporter gets what he or she needs by the deadline. That’s an instant way to always keep a reporter on your side.

And even if that, you know, that honesty is, “We’re not going to comment on that because we don’t think it’s prudent, but I will tell you that.” Or better yet, “We won’t comment on that specific instance, but I will be more than happy to get you someone to talk to you about the general side of it,” in which case you could use those sound bites. They were always making sure there was some kind of response instead of a “No Comment.” The public doesn’t like it; reporters don’t like it; and it’s not good policy. (June 22, 2011)

A straightforward approach has benefits for both PIOs and journalists in building relationships. PIOs that maintain an open approach to media relations and approach journalists with candor earn a reputation for reliability and respect over time. Journalists who approach all parties they cover and deal fairly with them in newsgathering earn a reputation as a credible journalist and someone to be trusted with greater accessibility over time. Consistent, honest approaches professional enable both parties to establish strong reputations and greater accessibility to the resources both parties can provide to one another. More importantly, a strong sense of mutual respect built on open dialogue and consistency will enable a stronger shared role in co-creating an enlightened citizenry and enhance the ability of PIOs to enhance the reputation of state governments by establishing greater accountability to citizens. With the factors influencing working relationships between PIOs and journalists spelled out from both parties’ perspectives, the next section presents a new model designed to help both PIOs and journalists build productive working relationships that help build an enlightened citizenry and improve the actions and reputation of state governments with the public.

## Chapter 5: The STRAPS Model

The working relationships between PIOs and journalists exist on a continuum, and shift as conditions and practices change over time (See Figure 5.1). At one end, journalists and PIOs are antagonistic and have highly contentious interactions where both parties make collaborative work impossible. In Louisiana, the interactions between the Governor's press office and the press corps are highly contentious. Journalists often abandon collaboration and seek to make state agencies and the governor accountable by finding alternative information sources in and around state government that provide information about the questionable practices of agencies and elected officials. PIOs adhering to centralization strategies actively seek to deceive journalists and control them in order to manipulate their agencies' reputations with the public.

	Fear of Loss of Reputation 	 Institutional Pressures	
	<b>Antagonism</b>	<b>Negotiated, Productive Relationships</b>	<b>Symbiosis</b>
<b>Public Information Officer (PIO)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deception of Journalists</li> <li>• Obstruction of Journalists</li> <li>• Manipulation of Journalists</li> <li>• Circumvention of Journalists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator of Access</li> <li>• Strategic Limitations to Accountability</li> <li>• Seeks Collaboration, When Possible</li> <li>• Educator's Role With Media</li> <li>• Candor, Within Limits</li> <li>• Varying Trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparent Approach</li> <li>• Total Media Accountability</li> <li>• Disregard for Internal Pressure</li> </ul>
<b>Journalist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combative in Reporting</li> <li>• Circumventing PIOs</li> <li>• Absolute Skepticism About PIO's Information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varying Trust</li> <li>• Consults With Trusted PIOs</li> <li>• Candor With Trusted PIOs</li> <li>• Skepticism Mitigated by Experience</li> <li>• Watchdog/Skepticism Still Present on Critical Stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total Collaboration with PIOs</li> <li>• Withholding Unfavorable Government News</li> <li>• Complete Trust of PIOs</li> </ul>

**Figure 5.1: The PIO-Journalist Relationship Continuum**

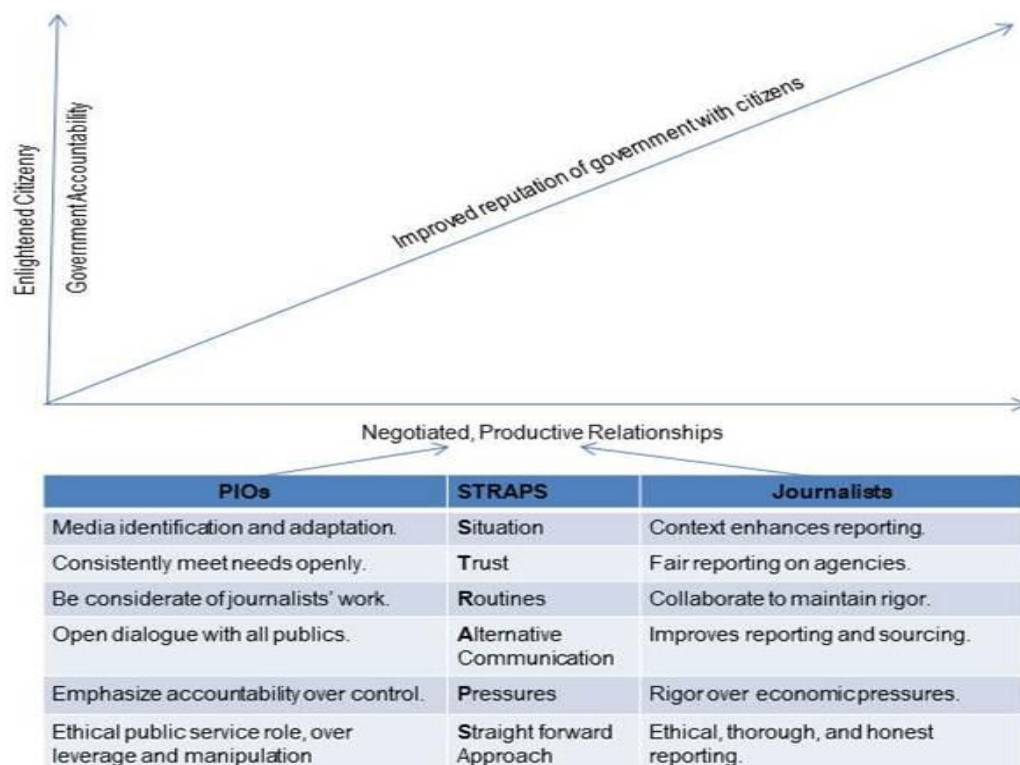
At the other end are symbiotic interactions where both PIOs and journalists are actively attending to the needs of one another and accommodative to each other's needs. Achieving pure symbiosis is unlikely, because of the institutional pressures both PIOs and journalists face within their own organizations. For PIOs, pressure to control message and manage reputation inhibit their ability to be purely accommodative and responsive to the needs of journalists, even in light of their ethical obligation to serve citizens by openly informing them about the practices of state government. Likewise, journalists must attend to their watchdog roles and scrutinize government thoroughly to give citizens a complete picture of the practices of government over time. It is often the case that institutional pressures put PIOs and journalists at cross-purposes.

The best case scenario for both PIOs and journalists is to achieve negotiated, productive relationships over time that fall between antagonism and symbiosis. The relationships are negotiated because the positions of both parties within a given situation will shift over time as issues evolve, good and bad stories come and go, and the opinion of one another changes. PIOs must adapt to the priorities and pressures within their agencies and negotiate the demands of administrators and staff while fulfilling their public service role. Depending on the nature of the story, journalists must be more skeptical and aggressive in inquiry, because of the need for a watchdog approach, rather than simply "feeding the beast." However, the economic decline of journalism and the subsequent practical limitations of journalists are creating situations where PIOs do help fill practical voids for journalists in their current precarious work environment.

In finding a middle ground, journalists can better fill a fourth estate role and PIOs can better fill their public service role to inform the public, both directly and through the media. When PIOs and journalists meet in the middle, the best interests of both parties can be met and the professional purposes of both parties can be satisfied. Ultimately, finding this middle ground

will bring the working relationships between PIOs and journalists closer to their unique role in co-creating an enlightened citizenry. In the process of enlightening citizens, state agencies will have to be more accountable in their practices, improving their work. In aspiring to a more open and accountable approach to informing the public, PIOs can ultimately help improve the practices and reputation of state agencies and state governments in the long term.

To help PIOs and journalists reach a negotiated middle ground, the researcher proposes a practical model (called the STRAPS model) for both PIOs and journalists (See Figure 5.2). The STRAPS model helps both PIOs and journalists work independently and collaboratively to overcome the pressures and challenges in play. Both PIOs and journalists will better fill their respective roles in co-creating an enlightened citizenry.



**Figure 5.2: The STRAPS Model**

## 5.1 Situation

Accounting for situation is critical to both PIOs and journalists when working to improve their working relationships. Among the most common criticisms each group of interviewees had with the other is that they are ignorant of the other's practical situation and the challenges that each is dealing with.

Situational theory (Grunig, 1989, 2009) asks practitioners to identify internal and external publics and to account for them in communications planning, implementation, evaluation, and adaptation over time. Thus, PIOs must proactively identify each of the publics that interact with their state agencies, including individual journalists covering state government. Identifying and tracking the individual needs, challenges, and pressures on each journalist enables dynamic problem solving that better meets the needs of each group over time. PIOs help improve their reputation as problem solvers by being attentive to each public and adapting approaches to meet the specific needs of each group or individual. This approach is also in keeping with RMT's (Bruning & Ledingham, 1998) call to proactively build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships.

PIOs must also be prepared to be dynamic in their approach with each public as social, political, practical, technological, and contextual factors shift over time. Applying the principles of relationship management theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) and situational theory (Grunig, 2009) in adapting to dynamic shifts are part of the work for PIOs and their agencies in the interest of building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with external publics.

Journalists must actively build a contextual knowledge of state government agencies and the individuals who work within them. A common complaint among interviewees is that journalists are losing experience and the time to build knowledge of the inner workings of state

agencies and governments. To manage this growing challenge, journalists should seek knowledge from other resources in and around government.

As part of PIOs' commitment to fulfilling a public service role in informing the public, they should be helping journalists build a stronger contextual knowledge of their agencies and state government. A common frustration among PIOs is the time and energy they feel is wasted in reeducating a new group of journalists every few months as the downturn in journalism has contributed to higher rates of turnover in newsrooms. As time passes, more naïve journalists are covering the beat. In spite of the frustration, PIOs should embrace this situation as it provides a means to develop a reputation for reliability and trustworthiness.

For journalists, building source relationships and contextual knowledge should be a constant, incremental process while covering state government. Adam Rhew, formerly of NBC 29 in Charlottesville, Virginia, explained that some of the most invaluable relationships he has made are with the security guards and ushers he intermittently talks with while on the beat. He explains that he finds the "30 five-minute conversations much more valuable than five 30-minute conversations" (August 23, 2011). In conversing with casual sources, he has learned the rhythm of government work in Richmond and found leads to bigger stories he would have never learned of otherwise.

Other journalists on the beat are also useful resources for new journalists to learn about state governments and their agencies. It is not uncommon for journalists to get together as peers and talk shop about PIOs, state agencies, their officials, and nuances within state governments. There is minimal concern about competing news organizations within the same market, so collaboration is collegial, and friendships commonly form with experience over time. Building contextual knowledge enhances journalists' abilities to maximize rigor in covering state



government, to identify multiple sources for investigation and verification, and to learn the best sources for information on the beat. This will better enable journalists to fill a fourth estate role in government (Cook, 2005; Hulteng & Nelson, 1971) by informing citizens of the practices of government in a more thorough manner. More accurate news coverage will force state governments to strive for greater accountability and ethical practices, ultimately improving their public reputation in a more permanent fashion than media control or manipulation.

## **5.2 Trust**

Building trust for both PIOs and journalists is essential to accomplishing their respective goals. Trustworthy PIOs develop reputations for being reliable, honest information brokers who do not manipulate or betray journalists. Likewise, journalists who build trust among PIOs and other sources in state governments earn a reputation for being trustworthy and can earn greater access to information and authoritative sources. A strong sense of trust between PIOs and journalists facilitates stronger relationships, which ultimately promote their shared function of building an enlightened citizenry.

PIOs must build trust by being consistent in their approach in responding to media queries with all journalists. Even in cases of delays or internal barriers, an honest approach will help promote patience among journalists, as well inform them if they must consult another source. Consistent, open interaction over time enables PIOs to build reputations as honest brokers, permitting greater access to news conduits. PIOs should strive to be partners in providing state government coverage because of their ethical obligation to inform the public.

The most essential element of building professional trust is professional experience. This permits journalists to establish a consistent sense of PIOs as people who meet their demands, who are honest in their approach to reporters, and who will not behave in an unethical manner in

providing information with the public. By consistently meeting expectations, PIOs strengthen trust with reporters (Blau, 1974; Burt & Knez, 1995; Homans, 1961).

This experience over time also permits PIOs to better get to know each of the reporters who cover their agency, to learn their habits as professionals, and to establish a rapport where each knows where the other comes from when a story about the agency is gaining media attention. Much as Burt (2005) describes the process of building weak ties, the process is incremental, and it takes time. Almost all PIOs note it took years to establish a professional rapport and trust with the reporters they work with on a regular basis.

Casual personal interface also helps improve trust by humanizing each party. Bob Johannessen characterized personal interface as a means of reducing barriers and the distance between PIOs and journalists. He used the expression “coffee cup diplomacy,” saying it is much harder to hate the guy standing across from you. He notes that if PIOs fire off an e-mail, they open the door to greater misinterpretation and conflict with reporters and publics when in disagreement. If PIOs make a phone call, it is less prone to misinterpretation, but reporters are still capable of dismissing them by hanging up the phone. PIOs who walk over to press row and stand face-to-face with journalists enable communication in a direct fashion and can improve the dialogue and mutual understanding. This practice adheres to the findings of scholars applying principles of RMT to journalist-practitioner relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 2007).

PIOs should seek to make acquaintances, and not actively seek friendships. Many journalists, including Jan Moller, noted that reporters are not looking for friends, because friends are not typically where they look for good sources. Several PIOs, including Chris Frink, note the goal is to build healthy acquaintances with reporters. It is a means of disarming some of the skepticism journalists bring to the relationship when interacting with PIOs. However, building

trust over time is the hardest part of the process because of the ever-shrinking time to get the job done for both PIOs and journalists. Several PIOs and journalists note they will incorporate a couple of minutes of personalization into phone calls and interactions to help facilitate relationship building.

A unique development is that former journalists are filling PIO roles in state government more frequently. Having left journalism for the economic stability PIO work can provide, these PIOs possess an intimate knowledge of journalism, but also arouse skepticism from some journalists who know them and expect them to abuse the position. As the capitol bureau of *The Advocate* in Baton Rouge noted, there are situations where practitioners who were journalists take advantage of internal knowledge of their former news organizations to put pressure on the reporter covering the organization in order to manipulate news coverage. For a PIO interested in building a productive and collaborative relationship, abuse of this relationship will certainly result in antagonism from the pool of reporters covering the agency.

Journalists can build trust with PIOs through fair reporting that consistently examines all perspectives in a story. If journalists are covering a story that involves a specific agency, they should be comfortable with contacting the agency and its PIO to seek comment. This provides agencies and their decision-makers with an opportunity to respond candidly and maintain accountability with the public through the media. This approach minimizes that antagonism and enhances the professional reputations of journalists (Jeffers, 1977). A common source of frustration among interviewees is journalists who never call the agency before running with a story, or they ignore agency input when reporting on a story.

By enhancing their professional reputations, journalists will ultimately earn greater accessibility and more prompt responses from PIOs. Based on the researcher's observations,

PIOs were even more responsive to journalists who had honest reputations and produced quality coverage that considered all perspectives. The coverage did not have to be positive, but if journalists were honest with the PIOs about the fact that it is a critical story and it would be better if the PIOs' agency administrators provided comment and context, then the PIOs appreciated that candor and worked with the journalist to provide an alternative perspective. Establishing mutual respect and trust between PIOs and journalists is critical to the shared role of PIOs and journalists in co-creating an enlightened citizenry.

### **5.3 Routines**

Attending to journalistic norms and routines is essential for both PIOs and journalists. PIOs attending to the normative values and practices of journalists are more successful in getting information to the public through news organizations. Given the ethical obligation of PIOs to inform the public, they should work to assist journalists in overcoming daily practical challenges. Applying journalistic norms and routines, while communicating in an open and ethical manner demonstrates professional respect for journalists and their fourth estate role in keeping the public informed. Demonstrating this respect helps to earn the trust of journalists over time.

Addressing media queries is a continual part of the process and a responsibility for PIOs on a daily basis. While it is true that journalists are a public for PIOs to manage, the reason for their prominence and prioritization with PIOs is due to their role as a primary information conduit for the broader public, including stakeholders like legislators, the governor, benefactors, and voters. If PIOs fail to maintain strong, productive relationships with their media contacts, the agencies they represent are more susceptible to negative or misrepresentative media coverage that can cast agencies and their administrators in a negative light. If agencies and their administrators are perceived of in a negative light, they may be subject to punitive reaction on

the part of voters, legislators who make budgetary and operational decisions and governors who make decisions on agency appointments. So, PIOs working to build productive, mutually beneficial relationships with the media are also working to building productive, mutually beneficial relationships with a broad spectrum of publics that agencies interact with by providing agency information in news content (Ledingham & Bruning, 2007).

The daily interaction between reporters and PIOs is often more incremental, and PIOs should approach it with an eye towards maintaining journalistic norms and routines. PIOs should also be prepared to re-prioritize their daily schedules and workloads to address media queries in a timely fashion. They should open the conversation with a direct inquiry into what information or individual a journalist needs to reach, some probative questions about the angle of the news story, and what his or her deadline is for the information requested. This is an area where PIOs can establish themselves as reliable information brokers who are attentive to the needs of each specific reporter they make contact with by attending to the daily routine of deadlines and content demands. This is in keeping with the transactional nature of relationship management (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000).

It is often the case that both the PIO and journalist have to e-mail and call periodically throughout the day. Journalists will call to check on the progress of the information being gathered and source availability, to seek additional supplemental information on a story, as well as to verify facts and story elements they uncover in the daily newsgathering process. PIOs will call to update reporters on their progress, to seek more clarity on a given story idea, and to offer other elements that might be of use to the reporter and that help promote programs or policy positions of the agency within the story content. PIOs' timely responses are as important as morning calls because open dialogue can help journalists determine how to manage their daily

newsgathering process in the most efficient manner possible. Getting the job done quickly and efficiently is particularly important in the current news cycle (Bivens, 2008; McChesney & Nichols, 2010). This process also speaks to maintaining a dynamic and adaptive approach to communicating with publics, as espoused in situational theory (Grunig, 2009).

PIOs also need to build knowledge about the differences in formatting, structure, and needs of different forms of media. Television reporters need consideration for lighting, shot frames, and on-camera availability for interviews. In the case of print journalists, response is a more flexible process at times, as journalists will take phone calls, organize phone interviews, and can be facilitated more easily within the daily schedule. However, in print, there is also a great demand for more depth in material. In the case of radio reporters, responsiveness on a tight timeline is necessary as they update news content on an hourly basis and need interview responses structured for sound bites.

Finally, emerging Internet-based news sites are highly divergent in approach, ranging from a “rip and read” approach of linking headlines to other news sites to actually covering and reporting on news stories in a manner similar to print reporters. Deadlines are a unique consideration as they are asynchronous from the traditional news cycle. Content demands tend to lean closer to immediacy, rather than timeliness (Singer, 2010). Shrinking deadlines are resulting in an even greater demand for PIOs to be responsive to journalists on a 24-hour schedule (Cushion & Lewis, 2009).

PIOs should also learn the fundamental styles of the media they interact with and how they generate content. The approach of individual newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and Web-based news entities are different from news room to news room. PIOs must be mindful in each situation, and strive to be as adaptive to each individual reporter’s needs and the larger

approach of his or her organization. Again, the ability to adapt by PIOs will help facilitate gaining access to the public through the news conduits. This is also in keeping with strategic segmentation and adaptation in Grunig's (2009) situational theory.

In addition to paying attention to style and format, PIOs should possess a sense of empathy for the pressures impacting the daily practices of reporters. PIOs need to be mindful of economic conditions and how these conditions are impacting the work environment of journalists covering the PIOs' agencies. Both parties note the importance of attending to the deadlines of journalists, the content demands of their respective formats, and the competitive needs of journalists.

With this economic climate in journalism, it is also critical for PIOs to help educate young reporters covering the agency. Mentioned earlier as a means of building trust, contextual knowledge aids PIOs with new reporters covering the agency. PIOs have to instill a sense of institutional history of the agency and state government being covered. As newsrooms and deadlines shrink while content demands rise, PIOs must fill a role of educator on context for reporters who do not possess the scope of the entire situation. This will minimize the potential for inaccurate news coverage due to journalists' ignorance of standard practices of state agencies.

Another consideration in the current climate is the ability of PIOs to perform as translators between journalists and agencies. Journalists are commonly striving to write or communicate at a sixth grade level in order to reach as broad an audience as possible. PIOs have to then help the journalists covering their agencies digest a very complex glut of information complicated by agency-specific jargon, legal language, or perhaps trade-specific language not applicable to a broader audience. Mentioned earlier, agencies like the Iowa DNR need a PIO like Kevin Baskins and his staff to take complex biological language, jargon, and legal terms and

digest them for journalists at a clear level to enable comprehension. A PIO who fails to clarify and take ambiguity out of information can leave too much to chance for journalists and the public in interpreting what is necessary about the work of an agency on their behalf.

PIOs have a fundamental need to provide accessibility to journalists covering their organization. One form of accessibility is expert sources at an agency who can speak with authority on a subject and help build the knowledge a reporter possesses on a particular subject. Another is granting access to the administrators of an agency, because journalists prefer expert sources or those considered authorities in the public eye. As several journalists noted, they want access to the policy makers rather than the PIO on a daily basis. This practice addresses journalists' need for knowledgeable, authoritative sources (Mindich, 1998; Schiller, 1981).

Journalists acknowledge that a PIO who is a part of the decision-making group in an agency is someone they can quote as an expert source. Ed Anderson of *The Times-Picayune* noted the former chief of staff for former Governor Mike Foster could be a reliable source in direct quotes or on background because he was “the voice of the Governor” and someone who knew exactly what was going on and was to be trusted because he operated with candor. The need to be part of the administration is a goal for PIOs to strive for because it not only helps them establish a proactive role in an organization, but it can help improve their standing with reporters.

Another aspect of daily interaction is the give-and-take between a journalist and a PIO. When stories are broadcast or printed, the portrayal of the agency can either be seen as positive or negative. In the case of negative story coverage, PIOs will often call journalists and critique the coverage, pointing out misrepresentations or factual omissions that may create negative perceptions about the agencies being covered. Journalists acknowledge that they want feedback



if it makes their coverage more accurate. This provides PIOs with an opportunity to improve their agency reputation and strengthen the quality of news that reaches citizens, filling their roles as co-creators of an enlightened citizenry.

In the event reporters do a good job of reporting on programs or showcasing agencies working effectively on behalf of the public, PIOs will make time to compliment the coverage and let reporters know they appreciate their efforts to get stories right. This is in keeping with the relationship management theory elements that focus on relationship building through personal interaction (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Ledingham & Bruning, 2007), and helps enhance the brokerage process between individuals (Burt, 2005).

In the past, this process was much more a matter of following up on news coverage, but give-and-take is becoming a more incremental process within the span of a work day for PIOs and reporters. With the advent of blogging, social and digital media, and more frequent television broadcasts (Ahmad, 2010; Bivens, 2008; Cushion & Lewis, 2009; McChesney & Nichols, 2010), PIOs can more incrementally shape the coverage of their organization by using give-and-take approaches with reporters throughout a news day. PIOs will now track the blogs and midday newscasts that cover their agencies and state government. In the event that a story emerges that is inaccurate, PIOs will call reporters and talk about the story. PIOs will emphasize the places where the story misses information or inaccurately frames the organization. PIOs will then offer avenues where journalists can follow up on stories to build more thorough, accurate pictures of agencies being covered.

PIOs note that give-and-take permits them to help shape the story before it reaches its final edition of publication or broadcast. The incremental blogging of print and broadcast reporters will often serve as the source material for their nightly broadcasts or morning edition

print stories. Television broadcasts will commonly re-run stories and can incorporate updated elements and revise editing for later broadcasts throughout the day. Even in the emerging realm of Web site news coverage, a PIO can help bloggers and digital journalists to incrementally improve the quality of their coverage while helping to improve public perceptions of the agency he or she represents through incremental give-and-take sessions.

Journalists must work to overcome their current practical pressures and limitations on professional norms and routines to provide a higher quality of coverage of state government. To do this, journalists must embrace collaboration with fellow reporters on the beat, in addition to PIOs when it serves both parties' needs. It is common on press row for journalists to draw on the experience of their colleagues to help build contextual knowledge and to weigh options in newsgathering. In the current work environment, journalists on press row are also now dividing workloads not only within news organizations but across beats to help shoulder the burden of covering more stories with fewer people in less time. Since most journalists working the same beat are not actually competitors, this makes collaboration between different news organizations more feasible.

Collaboration with PIOs is tempered at times by a sense of skepticism grounded in journalists' watchdog role in covering government. Journalists should satisfy their skepticism by cultivating alternative source relationships that can help verify or refute agency perspectives on stories. Journalists express their need to verify facts provided by PIOs. Journalists' skepticism will often prompt them to go to PIOs only after they have uncovered reliable facts elsewhere. Concerns that material provided by PIOs journalists do not know will be manipulative and inaccurate prompt this process of seeking comment only after cultivating a story through trusted sources. PIOs must accept this practice as professional and maintain candor when journalists

doubt information. When journalists verify that an honest PIO's input is accurate, trust of the PIO will grow with journalists.

#### **5.4 Alternative Communication**

In order to accomplish their shared goal to inform citizens about the practices of government, both journalists and PIOs must embrace the use of alternative conduits of communication. Social and digital media Web sites, as well as agency Web sites help PIOs and journalists connect with individuals who either no longer attend to traditional media conduits, or have diversified their media diets in learning about state government.

Interviewees note that social and digital media are providing PIOs with a means of reaching a wide cross-section of the public across media diets. They also provide PIOs with a means of directly communicating with citizens, as well as getting feedback from citizens about the services their agencies provide. As tools, social and digital media provide a means of enhancing public trust and respect for agencies and state government through responsiveness and open communication across diverse channels. Widely popular state agencies like the Iowa DNR, the Historical Preservation Division of the Louisiana Lieutenant Governor's Office, and the Iowa Department of Transportation have a healthy mix of media relations, interpersonal communication with the public via phone lines and public events, and tech-savvy staff members. They are making use of the technology to make a direct connection with citizens in what may be their only connection with the agency and their primary source of news and information.

Extending from common forms of social and digital media like Facebook and Twitter, PIOs should consider making use of Web publishing of videos and live streaming of events relevant to their respective agencies. The Louisiana House of Representatives PIO, Sheila McCant, made regular use of live streaming video of the legislative session and committee

meetings, but also works to maintain weekly press conferences with the Speaker of the House for the media and public. Several of the agencies observed and interviewed maintain *YouTube* and *Vimeo* accounts to archive and publish recorded informational videos for public education on new regulations and training, promotional videos for new events and programs for the public, as well as archived recordings of public events.

Another important consideration for PIOs is the amount of communication that is appropriate for social and digital media channels, necessitating selectiveness in communication. Professionals like Geoff Greenwood and Suzanne Hall both note excessive social and digital media posting can inundate people with comments to the point where they block you or ignore your postings, regardless of importance to them.

Unlike private sector practitioners, PIOs must consistently do more with less, so PIOs must be strategic about finding a more economical means of maximizing reach while reducing expenses. PIOs must find a good way to use social and digital media, internet video channels, and mobile technology to connect with the public whether through the media or directly with citizens in their respective states. These new technologies provide a means of bringing more clout to PIOs in reaching wider audiences.

However, while PIOs can develop a direct line to citizens that bypasses journalists, they must work to give journalists access to the same message at the same time. PIOs must remember that news outlets are still the most frequently consulted news sources for journalists looking to learn about government. Thus, news organizations should not be a source of competition on social and digital media channels, but another means to reach citizens with information.

To overcome perceptions of competition, PIOs must provide the same information for journalists to use. This mitigates perceptions among journalists of potential competition and

antagonism. This is consistent with the recommendations of Shin and Cameron (2003a, 2003b) to use Web-based forms of communication for media relations because of their perceived utility to journalists. An important consideration for PIOs is to look ahead when it comes to new communication technologies. Many interviewees expressed the position that social and digital media formats come and go. Therefore, PIOs must track and adapt technologies to ensure their communication formats remain relevant to citizens and journalists.

Journalists also must be proficient in reporting in traditional news conduits, as well as through social and digital media channels. Each interviewee maintains Twitter, Facebook, and Web presences for promotion and dissemination of news content on a daily basis. This is in keeping with recent norms and routines literature on the application of new technology in reporting (Ahmad, 2010; Bivens, 2008; Singer, 2010). In order to try and maximize audience, journalists must now appeal to a wider scope of media consumption to draw people to news coverage. With attention to traditional televised and print news in decline, new conduits provide a means of filling a fourth estate role with tech-savvy members of the public. Much as PIOs must maximize their reach, so too must journalists in their current economic climate.

Journalists should also be able to utilize social and digital media as a means of gathering information and building media contacts. Journalists speak about the use of these conduits for initial research, crowdsourcing from viewers and followers, as well as a means to track the actions of prominent figures and news sources. Social and digital media serve as initial steps in the newsgathering process (Ahmad, 2010; Bivens, 2008), and a way to test story topics for feasibility in the initial phase of planning.

Mentioned earlier, they are also using it as a means to engage with PIOs in give-and-take on stories to improve their finished news products throughout the day. While PIOs see the

benefit of shaping coverage of their organization throughout the day, journalists see their own benefits in improving the accuracy of their coverage in an incremental reporting process. They can find new sources, check potential inaccuracies, and update the story before submission of the final product for publication or broadcast.

While the final product may be stronger, this process does present challenges in the fact that citizens do not always look at the finished product, and may not catch the changes in facts and information throughout the day. With this in mind, journalists must be clear about changes in information and embrace a digital form of retraction on their blogs and social and digital media in an effort to help citizens get the accurate account of a story whenever they check these conduits. This will reinforce a journalist's reputation for candor and trustworthiness among PIOs and state government employees, in keeping with brokerage (Burt & Knez, 1995).

## **5.5 Pressures**

Institutional pressures are factors that both journalists and PIOs must manage in building and maintaining productive relationships with one another. PIOs must negotiate internal pressures from their agencies and from state governments to control the message. Managing these pressures is crucial in filling their role as public servants working to inform the public about the practices of state governments. PIOs can manage these pressures by building trust within their agencies and by building knowledge about a PIO's role, the practices of journalists, and the value of productive media relationships.

While the study focus is on the external relationships between PIOs and journalists, the internal relationships a PIO must maintain will ultimately influence the ability of a PIO to build strong media relations by helping them overcome internal pressures to control or manipulate the media. Staff members must have an understanding of the practitioners' role as an ethical

communicator that is obligated to inform the public. To do this, the agency must understand that open communication with journalists and the public over time helps build a positive reputation for accountability, which strengthens public trust of the organization.

By building an internal sense of understanding and importance of PIOs and news media, PIOs are able to facilitate greater media accessibility to information and sources. Strong internal trust of PIOs reduces the internal pressure to control messages or centralize communication, which improves their autonomy to work dynamically to manage media relations and agency tasks. This permits PIOs to be better representatives for agencies and better contacts for journalists covering state governments. Many PIOs hold multiple media coaching sessions throughout the year to help facilitate understanding of the media and how best to respond and interact with journalists covering the agency. Part of this training is helping agency members learn about journalistic norms and routines. Important in this education process is helping agency members understand how their language, perspective, and context must be communicated with other staff members to the public through the media. A perspective reiterated by many PIOs is the need to help agency staff members understand the difference between agency process and the newsgathering process, and why when the media calls, it is necessary to shift focus and accommodate requests within the deadlines of reporters.

A natural extension of building internal relationships is the ability of a PIO to earn a spot in the decision-making body of his or her organization. This trust and sense of value must also exist with agency administrators and policy decision-makers whom PIOs work for. Renée Greer described this as an essential component to build as it will allow a PIO to also be an advocate between the agency, reporters, and the various publics which an agency must address in executing policy.

Renée Greer talked about the role as one where PIOs need to stand up for citizens and the media because they are culpable to both groups, and they should consider the impact of the agencies' positions and reaction to the decisions made and practices endorsed by agencies and their staffs. A proactive effort to do so will not only help avoid larger problems with the agency and other publics, but it will help instill contextual knowledge within the agency and its staff about how decisions and practices impact the public and how the media will respond to those behaviors. PIOs should help their agencies understand that their reputation will ultimately improve by not only creating a perception of open communication and accountability, but also by establishing the importance of maintaining accountability in their practices. The goal should be a positive reputation in practice, not just in the press. This can help facilitate mutually beneficial relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2007) with the media and other publics by helping agency staff and administrators cultivate a conscientious concern for publics when making crucial decisions.

However, there are situations when PIOs are kept distant from their administrators. Sheila McCant was marginalized within the Louisiana State Legislature because of the lack of a direct line between her and her bosses. As a result, her role with reporters was diminished, and her advice to key members of the organization was not sought until it was too late. PIOs note that when administrators ask them to lie or expect deception of reporters in an overt manner, it is time for them to find a new job. PIOs value the trust of their contacts, and they know burning trust is irrevocable. One deception can damage the professional reputation for the balance of a career. PIOs consider finding a new position easier than repairing a damaged reputation.

Journalists must fill a fourth estate role by producing high quality news coverage that accounts for the full perspective behind an event and issue and gives voice to all relevant parties.



This is done by rejecting managerial pressures that influence newsworthiness (McChesney & Nichols, 2010; Singer, 2005), shape tone of coverage (Singer, 2005; Picard, 2008), and weaken rigor of journalists in covering state government and its prominent sources (Picard, 2008; Pointdexter, Heider, & McCombs, 2006).

While many journalists express that they feel that management has been supportive about letting reporters be autonomous in their news coverage; they see the role of the sales department growing within the newsroom. Several examples indicate that marketing concerns and pressure from prominent sources are having a direct impact on the ability to fully cover a story. Mentioned earlier, Ed Anderson of *The Times-Picayune* has had several important stories about state government cut or minimized in prominence because of a drive among management to emphasize coverage of stories within New Orleans. Anderson has also expressed that another challenge he's faced is an inability to critically cover Governor Jindal because of an editorial board emphasis on supporting the candidate they endorsed in the 2007 gubernatorial election. In order to fill a fourth estate role (Cook, 2005; Hulteng & Nelson, 1971), journalists must embrace more rigorous, thorough coverage of state government that challenges economic pressures through adaptation that overcomes pragmatic limits.

## **5.6 Straightforward Approach**

Essential to productive working relationships between PIOs and journalists is maintaining a straightforward, ethical approach. PIOs currently have ethical dilemmas that they must overcome in the leverage they can currently wield over journalists to control the message, rather than working productively with journalists to inform the public. Journalists must avoid potential abuses of PIOs and state agencies when covering state government that may be a byproduct of corners cut to fill content over the course of time.

In the environment of state government, the professional circles of PIOs and journalists are small and everyone talks. Mentioned earlier, in the event a PIO lies or works to deny a reporter access to information he or she is entitled to ask for, the reputation of the PIO in question will go into decline as the reporter discovers the deception and talks with colleagues about it. The choice to willfully deceive or “stone wall” reporters can be a permanent scar on a PIO’s professional reputation, and the reason why PIOs in many cases refuse to lie for their bosses, and even threaten to quit if they are asked to.

For PIOs, maintaining candor with journalists consistently over time is central to building a reputation as an honest broker of information, enhancing PIO reliability. Adhering to their ethical obligation as public servants reinforces a PIO’s reputation as an honest broker with all reporters in state government. These approaches strengthen media relationships and enhance agency reputation for accountability with journalists and the public, helping to improve state government’s reputation with citizens.

Reporters appreciate PIOs who are honest with them in the process, even if they procedurally cannot comment on a story. In the process of accounting for a journalist’s requests, PIOs will encounter situations where they cannot meet specific components of each demand. PIOs must approach the situation with candor and explain to the reporter that obtaining the material requested within the given timeframe or granting access to a specific source on that given day is not possible. Reporters will be frustrated, but will appreciate being informed up front that a possible source is unavailable because this permits them to explore other options in a timely fashion so they can still meet deadlines. Mentioned in a previous chapter, Pam Moyer at the Virginia DRPT noted a sense of relief when she admitted not knowing something the first time with a reporter, and he was receptive to the answer.

Reporters have to acknowledge that there are limits to the candor PIOs can operate with. In many cases, the administrators and staff members within PIOs' agencies have strategic demands to keep communication limited for policy implementation, when the timing or the sensitivity of the public may have on controversial issues is strong. Restriction is important in cases of investigations or events where the age and identity of individuals are protected by state and federal regulation. PIOs must acknowledge and adhere to these limits while working to help reporters understand the boundaries under which they have to operate. Reporters must understand that those limitations are in many cases not an attempt to deceive them and they must avoid letting it be a source of frustration. In such cases, they should seek other conduits to build the story before coming to PIOs for agency confirmation or commentary.

Going along with these other elements is the decision of whether or not to stay on-the-record or to go off of it. There are strategic situations where going off-the-record can be beneficial. PIOs acknowledge it is strictly on a basis of whether or not they have a wealth of experience with their counterparts and they know they can trust them on the job. Also important is an understanding that off-the-record does not mean reporters will no longer pursue the story. Off-the-record is simply a strategic means for journalists to learn the background information they need, but the journalist will have to dig deeper for verification from individuals who will go on-the-record, or they will print what is learned while acknowledging sources speak on the condition of anonymity. Trust is important for PIOs working in media relations with journalists, and time, consistency, and reliability all impact the ability of a PIO to build and maintain it.

Another approach to being straightforward comes from a few PIOs who suggest the importance of working to maintain a professionally neutral role with reporters. While many PIOs strive to build trusting relationships on the basis of personal acquaintance, a few practitioners

like Dena Gray-Fisher and Renée Greer endorse an approach to professionalism which completely eschews prioritization of reporter response and access and off-the-record rapport, and endorses allowing agency members to answer questions from reporters once they have sought contact through the PIO's office. Maintaining candor with reporters helps build a reputation as a fair broker and will also develop the trust needed to be collaborative.

Journalists who maintain candor with PIOs, even when not disclosing news angles or long-term newsgathering strategies, build respect, even in situations where it is a tough news day for state agencies. Rigorous newsgathering that is done in an open, ethical manner that incorporates a full perspective ultimately improves a journalist's reputation with PIOs and state agencies. Noted in several cases, journalists will contact PIOs they trust and in the event that they are not getting confirmation on a story they have already confirmed by other means, they will encourage the PIOs to check again to ensure they are on the same page as the journalists. This demonstrates respect for the person as a professional, and helps them work their way back into the loop with agency staff members and administrators. When approaching one another as respected counterparts, PIOs and journalists should have no need to embarrass one another willfully by going around each other.

The long-term benefits of a respectful, honest approach in reporting work to enhance newsgathering for reporters within the current economic climate. Journalists with strong reputations for fair treatment enhance PIOs' timely responsiveness and accessibility in responding to media inquiries. This improves the ability of journalists to manage increasing content demands under shrinking deadlines, and will also improve the quality of news coverage in terms of depth of information and authoritative sources accessed through PIOs.

## 5.7 Summary

PIOs and journalists play a critical, shared role in creating an informed citizenry through the information both provide to the public. However, the current status of journalism, institutional pressures, and potential abuses of working relationships are hindering their ability to perform this role, eroding government accountability and public trust over time.

To overcome these challenges, the researcher proposes the STRAPS model for PIOs and journalists engaging in media relations. The model encourages PIOs and journalists to work together to inform citizens about the practices of state government. PIOs and journalists can facilitate collaboration by building trust over time with one another. Collaboration enables both PIOs and journalists to overcome practical limitations in their respective work environments. Changing media diets require both PIOs and journalists to apply emerging technologies to facilitate wider dissemination of information. Open communication and newsgathering requires both parties to resist institutional pressures in order to uphold professional ethics. Finally, approaching each of their tasks with a sense of candor and ethics builds a sense of reliability and mutual trust over time, even when coping with practical limitations imposed upon them.

PIOs can help state government build a reputation for accountability and trustworthiness by maintaining open communication that promotes ethical practices within state agencies. Journalists can better fulfill their role as members of the fourth estate by adapting their practices to the current climate, without surrendering rigor to appeal to primacy or efficiency in newsgathering. Together, PIOs and journalists can better inform citizens and influence state governments to better serve the needs of citizens.

## **Conclusion**

The working relationships between PIOs and journalists are important because of their shared role in co-creating an enlightened citizenry. PIOs are different from other public relations practitioners because of their ethical obligation to openly inform the public. Journalists who cover state government have an obligation as members of the fourth estate to rigorously cover state government and serve as watchdogs that inform the public of the practices of state government. In sum, PIOs and journalists are the primary means by which citizens learn about state government.

PIOs and journalists should be able to rely on each other to accomplish these goals. Journalists provide conduits through which PIOs can reach the public with information. PIOs provide journalists with a point of contact through which they can access information and authoritative sources needed to cover a story. Ideally, PIOs and journalists should work collaboratively to cultivate an enlightened citizenry through open, ethical communication and thorough reporting in negotiated, productive working relationships.

The ideal situation, however, is not the state of working relationships between PIOs and journalists. PIO-journalist working relationships range from pure antagonism to symbiosis, and typically fall somewhere between the two on the basis of several characteristics. Centralization of communication within state governments serves as a means of minimizing leaks and ensuring consistency of messages between the governors' offices and each of the subordinate agencies. The goal of centralizing communication is to shape public opinion and knowledge of state government in the favor of sitting elected officials. Unfortunately, centralization is also a source of closure (Burt, 2005) that promotes antagonism between PIOs and journalists because of the likelihood it weakens PIOs' autonomy and flexibility when interacting with journalists.

Journalists' frustrations with reduced access, slower responses, or complete ignorance of requests contribute to a weaker trust of PIOs and a stronger tendency to engage in more aggressive reporting that casts state government in a negative light. These characteristics are a strong illustration of the differences between the antagonistic relationships of public relations practitioners and journalists that Jeffers (1977) noted and the symbiotic relationships that scholars have identified in light of changing conditions in the past decade (Howard, 2004; Ledingham & Bruning, 2007; Sallot & Johnson, 2006).

Institutional pressures are a force of closure (Burt, 2005) and have a negative impact on both PIOs and journalists, contributing to less collaborative working relationships. PIOs are feeling internal pressures from agency staff and administrators to control the message and influence public opinion, rather than openly providing information and access to journalists when requested. The restriction in access and reduced responsiveness promotes antagonism among journalists, resulting in a greater likelihood of journalists to bypass PIOs and consult alternative sources.

Journalists, too, are coping with internal pressures from managers and the newsroom to pursue stories from a specific point of view, as well as promoting the principle of getting the story first over getting the story right. The impact of these pressures on journalists' newsgathering is increasing inaccuracies and misrepresentations of state agencies. Inaccurate news coverage injures the reputations of state agencies and aggravates PIOs, weakening the reputation of journalists and limiting PIO willingness to provide access and be responsive.

The impact of economic decline in journalism can be both a force of closure or brokerage (Burt, 2005) in its influence on working relationships between PIOs and journalists. Cost cutting is leading to more young, naïve journalists who have weaker source relationships covering state

government. Additionally, these young reporters are expected to cover more topics in less time. This combination of increased demand and greater limitation is opening a window for PIOs to be a reliable resource for journalists who need help building knowledge and filling voids created by economic pressures in journalism.

PIOs who embrace a public servant's approach and provide open access to information and sources that help journalists fill a fourth estate role improve working relationships over time. This finding is in concert with the research of Howard (2004), Sallot and Johnson (2006), and Ledingham and Bruning (2007) about the value of attending to journalistic norms and routines to building productive working relationships between public relations practitioners and journalists. The ability of PIOs to provide unique resources to journalists and the ability to provide access to journalists in this situation supports Granovetter's (1973) finding that building and maintaining weak ties provides individuals with access to resources outside of their immediate network.

Unfortunately, there are PIOs who bow to internal pressures to control messages and state government centralization. Some PIOs seek to capitalize on journalism's current challenges and exert leverage over journalists in working relationships to get their message through news organizations to the public in an effort to shape public opinion. This breaks from the ethical obligation of PIOs to openly provide information to citizens, either directly or through the media.

Veteran reporters embrace a watchdog role, and see the potential for these abuses and draw on alternative information sources to counteract such abuses. This approach, however, is growing less frequent over time as the number of veteran reporters on each state's press row is declining with each round of cutbacks. PIOs who embrace manipulation foster greater skepticism among journalists, weakening their reputation for reliability and increasing journalist antagonism. These findings reinforce the same concerns and practical shifts taking place in



journalism in light of economic pressures and practical changes to the practice of journalism (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 2009; McChesney & Nichols, 2010; Pointdexter, Heider, & McCombs, 2006; Pinto, 2008, 2009). These findings also support the work of social network scholars that suggest that failing to meet expectations weakens trust between individuals of different networks (Blau, 1974; Burt, 2005; Homans, 1961).

Emerging communication technologies, specifically social and digital media, can also be both forces of closure or brokerage (Burt, 2005) in the impact that they have on working relationships between PIOs and journalists. PIOs who provide information across a diverse set of conduits offer another resource for journalists seeking to economize newsgathering and maximize output, increasing their reputation for reliability among journalists. Social and digital media also provide a means for two-way communication between journalists and PIOs through which journalists can communicate with PIOs and enhance the quality of incremental daily reporting from initial blog posting to the finished product in the evening broadcast or next morning's paper.

On the other hand, journalists report through the same social and digital media conduits, and understand that PIOs' primary purpose for using these conduits is to gain a direct line to the public. Journalists are beginning to perceive the potential for these conduits to be a form of competition, rather than a reliable resource. This perception among journalists only amplifies skepticism and antagonism, negatively impacting working relationships.

Finally, ethical professional interaction is a force of brokerage that can be a means by which both PIOs and journalists can strengthen working relationships. PIOs who establish themselves as honest, open, and consistent in their approach build reputations as honest brokers and are typically seen as more reliable among journalists. Journalists who are thorough and fair

in their coverage of stories and who communicate with PIOs in a professional, honest manner earn a reputation for trustworthiness and gain greater accessibility to the information and sources they need. These findings are in keeping with Burt and Knez's (1995) process of building trust with individuals in different networks through building the same reputation with multiple members of those networks called third person referents.

The researcher offers the STRAPS model as a means of helping both PIOs and journalists to build negotiated, productive working relationships over time. Journalists and PIOs who build a full understanding of the context they are working in and adapt their approach to account for contextual differences between individuals are more likely to build positive reputations and improve working relationships. Understanding each other's situation enhances the ability to build trust on common ground.

Consistent, fair treatment, over time reinforces PIOs' and journalists' reputations for trustworthiness and reliability. Trust between PIOs and journalists takes time, and is only achieved by maintaining a fair and honest approach with one another. Consistently meeting expectations opens doors for both PIOs and journalists with their counterparts.

PIOs must have a practical knowledge of journalistic norms and routines, as well as the pressures on journalists to better accommodate their needs and fill a public service role in helping them inform the public. Journalists must maintain their journalistic norms and routines, and seek means of maintaining rigor in coverage in spite of the current economic climate. In order to overcome the challenges the current economic climate in journalism poses to an enlightened citizenry, both PIOs and journalists can work with one another to get agency information to the public and to meet the needs of journalists in terms of content demands and quality of information.

PIOs should seek to use alternative communication channels as a means of reaching broader publics, but should also provide journalists the opportunity to access the same information disseminated across new conduits. This approach will minimize perceptions of competition and helps disseminate the same message across an even wider set of information conduits to as broad a cross-section of the public as possible. The added expectation of journalists to provide content across social and digital media conduits creates a need for proficiency with new technologies and a potential demand for using PIO social and digital media channels as a part of the newsgathering process.

Both PIOs and journalists must overcome internal pressures and embrace their shared role of co-creating an enlightened citizenry. PIOs must strive to fill a public service role by helping educate agency staff and administrators on the purpose of PIOs in media relations and public communication, as well as on the value of building negotiated relationships with journalists rather than manipulating them. It is crucial for PIOs to help agency administrators and staff members build an appreciation for the importance of open accountability to news media to long-term agency reputation. Through building an emphasis on agency accountability and respecting the work of journalists, PIOs can help agencies build greater trust with members of the public and ensure long-term prosperity of the agency with citizens and elected officials.

Journalists must challenge the growing pressures to get information out first and to provide news content that draws an audience. They must find ways to perform thorough verification of information in newsgathering and make the case for the relevance of government news stories to their audience. Only by engaging citizens in the practices of their government can journalists really fill a fourth estate role and serve as watchdogs that can help enhance the practices of government on behalf of citizens.

Finally, both PIOs and journalists must maintain a straightforward approach in dealing with one another to strengthen working relationships. PIOs who maintain candor and a consistent approach with journalists are seen as trustworthy and reliable, prompting more positive reception among reporters. Journalists who are honest and fair in their coverage of state agencies and state government earn reputations for trustworthiness with PIOs, gaining greater accessibility and more rapid responsiveness over time.

The study also uncovered several emergent themes that merit further exploration. The prevalence of former journalists filling roles as PIOs is growing with the continued economic decline of journalism and the relative economic stability in PIO positions, as well as the strategic value of journalists in public information positions. This emergent aspect necessitates an exploration of the differences in approach between PIOs who have strictly public relations backgrounds and those who are former journalists. Do they espouse public relations principles, values, and ethical practices? What are the relative advantages that former journalists may hold over career practitioners in PIO positions? Another element that is in play is the impact that PIOs who used to be journalists on the beat has on the perception journalists have of them when they switch career fields?

Also important to track is the connection between former journalists and PIO positions. Will PIO positions continue to be filled by former journalists being recruited for their knowledge of journalism? Will economic stability continue to be an effective tool for luring journalists from their discipline to public information? What potential influences does this difference in skill sets have on PIO-journalist relationships? What impact will this also have on the internal relationships between agency staffs and PIOs, as they will be shifting from scrutinizing the agency to supporting it? This particular trend merits greater exploration and attention as it

continues to evolve in light of economic change (Bagdikian, 2004; Cushion & Lewis, 2009; McChesney & Nichols, 2010; Picard, 2008; Robinson, 2010) and skill requirements for journalists (Ahmad, 2010; Singer, 2005, 2010), as well as PIOs (Howard, 2004).

A more surprising element in play is the stability of PIOs in state government positions, or within a specific state government. Regardless of political elections and administrative regime changes, PIOs maintain a high level of experience and stability as practitioners in a specific state government. What factors aside from breadth of contacts and knowledge of media relations contribute to the relative stability while administrators commonly shift with the results of political elections and subsequent appointments?

One final surprise in this setting is the divergent nature of new technology use among practitioners in the state government setting. The breadth of application of social and digital media among practitioners in state government is still spreading and evolving, and is predicated on a variety of factors including resource availability, skill proficiency, identified utility, and perceived challenges in the application of technology. As applications of social and digital media become clearly defined in use and value, it will be interesting to see if more state agencies adopt the technology, or if they remain selective for the same reasons identified in this study. Will making use of social and digital media create a true source of competition for journalists working to cover state government?

The continued study of these trends in media relations as they remain dynamic and continue to evolve is critical not only for understanding the broader relationship between PIOs and journalists as time passes, but also in identifying successful tools in media relations and journalism for aspiring practitioners working to start and maintain careers in both fields over time. Scholars like Garnett (1992) and Graber (1992) spoke of the utility of the technologies of

their time, which are now woefully obsolete, but the principle of making contact is still critical. Today's Facebook and Twitter will likely have a vastly different tool in their place. Keeping a dynamic eye on the tools of each era and how they are used will be critical in teaching future practitioners, as well as updating the tool kits of practitioners already in the discipline.

While these findings are indicative of some preliminary trends, they need a broader inquiry into the discipline to see if the same trends and practices are in place across a broader context of state government practitioners. How will more complex state governments compare to smaller state governments in terms of media relations and the relationship between PIOs and journalists? In Louisiana, we see a state where one political party is growing more successful in controlling the state government, and has embraced a more restrictive, centralized form of political communication and media relations. What impact will different state political make ups have on the approach of state governments and state agencies in informing citizens and their approaches to media relations?

Also meriting further exploration is the continued impact of economic shifts on journalism (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney & Nichols, 2010) in covering state government. The norms and routines of journalists continue to change, and pressures of time, content output, and demand to fill multiple information conduits continues to grow (Singer, 2005, 2010). What means will journalists use to help mitigate these pressures to produce content, at a faster pace, across several channels on a daily basis? What role will PIOs play in helping journalists manage these challenges, and will they be of service in meeting these increasing expectations over time?

The impact of brain drain in journalism, as more experienced and more highly educated reporters are replaced with young reporters without the same education or experience in a cost-cutting effort, demands exploration. Will the decline in knowledge and experience create a

greater demand for PIOs to fill roles as educators and facilitators of news content due to increasing demand to fill space? Will this perpetuate a symbiotic relationship or even create a dependency on PIOs to effectively gather news? Will PIOs move away from a public service role and cement greater antagonism with reporters covering state government? What impact will all of these factors have on the shared role of informing the public and co-creating an enlightened citizenry? This researcher believes that the adaptive, collaborative, and ethical approach outlined in the STRAPS model is one way that both journalists and PIOs can negotiate growing challenges to their shared responsibility to inform citizens.

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## **Appendix A: PIO Interview Protocol**

Date of interview:

Location of interview:

Description/notes about location:

Name of interviewee:

Title:

Years at agency:

Professional & Educational background:

E-mail address:

1. The following interview is being audio recorded for the purposes of data collection. Is this acceptable?
2. The data collected in this interview is meant for research purposes only. In the event any question may present a problem for you professionally, or you feel uncomfortable responding, you have the right to refuse to answer any question, or to respond under the condition of confidentiality. At any time, you are free to discontinue participation. Are you comfortable with this and still willing to participate?
3. Tell me about your daily operations here at the office?
4. How are your staff members and tasks organized?
  - a. Your boss(es)
  - b. Staff
  - c. Tasks
  - d. Flow of operations
5. Tell me a little bit about the work culture around the office?
  - a. Relationship with bosses
  - b. Relationship with other staff members
  - c. Relationship of your office with other state agencies
6. How would you characterize your working relationship with journalists?
7. What do you think about the profession of journalism?
8. What have you found helps you build positive relationships with journalists?
  - a. Relationship cultivation
  - b. Resources
  - c. Strategy
  - d. Experience

9. What do you think gets in the way of building a positive working relationship with journalists?
10. What is your take on on-the-record and off-the-record?
  - a. Benefits
  - b. Detriments
  - c. How do you use it?
11. What are your goals in approaching media relations?
  - a. Agency
  - b. Journalists
  - c. Citizens
12. How would you say you measure success or failure in reaching goals?
  - a. Objectives/Goals
  - b. Observability
  - c. Measurability
13. What's your take on the economic downturn in mainstream media?
  - a. Impact on media relations
  - b. Impact on agency relations with the public
14. What are your internal challenges as a PIO?
  - a. Resources
  - b. Legal
  - c. Accountability to multiple bosses
  - d. Staffing
15. What are your external challenges as a PIO?
  - a. Accountability to public
  - b. Citizen trust
  - c. Personal Credibility
  - d. Agency Credibility
  - e. Competition with other agencies for coverage
  - f. Media access
16. How do you view your role between your agency and with the media?
  - a. Mediator
  - b. Advocate

- c. Accommodator
17. What are your primary goals with any given public?
- a. Meeting agency needs
  - b. Meeting Public needs
  - c. Outcomes
18. How much analysis of publics do you do in preparation?
- a. Attention of publics to issue or agency
  - b. Levels of interest on topic
  - c. Potential stance and threats of each public to agency and issue
19. Do you revisit audience analysis throughout?
- a. How often?
  - b. Why not?
  - c. Inhibitions?
20. How much flexibility (or autonomy) do you have in conducting work?
21. How much trust does your boss have in you and your input?
- a. Manager distrust of media
  - b. Distrust of PIO because of role as media go-between for agency (caterer)
22. What kinds of tools do you use to reach your publics during media campaigns?
- a. Press releases
  - b. Briefings
  - c. Backgrounders
  - d. Web sites
  - e. Social and Digital Media
23. What impact do internal factors have on your media relations work?
- a. Agency Status
  - b. Structure of Agency
  - c. PIO Autonomy
  - d. PIO Administration membership
  - e. Agency Administration
  - f. Personality

24. What impact do external factors have on media relations work?

- a. Agency threats
- b. Political environment
- c. Sociocultural environment
- d. Public influence
- e. Agency relationships with the public
- f. Interagency collaboration/Communication vertically & horizontally

### **Message/Messenger/Audience/Agency**

25. Tell me about your thought process in communicating with the public?

- a. Message, Messenger, and Medium

26. What impact does the agency management situation have on media relations?

### **New Technology**

27. Do you utilize facebook, twitter, or blogs in conducting media relations?

28. What do you use it for?

- a. Research
- b. Networking
- c. Outreach
- d. Archive
- e. Promotion
- f. Education

29. In your experience, do these tools facilitate working relationships with journalists?

### **Norms and Routines in Media Relations**

30. How much attention do you pay to the needs of journalists when crafting messages?

- a. Deadlines
- b. Content Preferences
- c. Demands of Editors, Public, and Newsrooms
- d. Values most essential to journalists
- e. Pressures on journalists to perform

### **Context**

31. What is a crisis scenario for you?



32. What kind of impact does a crisis scenario have on your work environment?
- a. Impact on flow of operations though staff
  - b. Impact on daily operations
  - c. Influence on the work culture
33. Now let's consider issue management rather than crisis when thinking about these different publics (developing event/continuing coverage)?
- a. Impact on flow of operations though staff
  - b. Impact on daily operations
  - c. Influence on the work culture and your philosophy
34. What about information campaigns, specifically?
- a. Impact on flow of operations though staff
  - b. Impact on daily operations
  - c. Influence on the work culture and your philosophy
35. How about conflict resolution?
- a. Impact on flow of operations though staff
  - b. Impact on daily operations
  - c. Influence on the work culture and your philosophy
36. How about community relations?
- a. Impact on flow of operations though staff
  - b. Impact on daily operations
  - c. Influence on the work culture and your philosophy
37. How much of a role would you say state politics have on your practice?
- a. Media Relations
  - b. Officials
  - c. Publics
  - d. Agency Communication
38. What about staff size for you vs. others?
- a. Large staff benefits
  - b. Problems of small staffs
  - c. Impact on approach
39. Any external resources for feedback and constructive criticism?

## **Appendix B: Journalist Interview Protocol**

Date of interview:

Location of interview:

Description/notes about location:

Name of interviewee:

Title:

Years at network/station:

Professional/Education (journalism & PR) background:

E-mail address:

1. The following interview is being audio recorded for the purposes of data collection. Is this acceptable?
2. The data collected in this interview is meant for research purposes only. In the event any question may present a problem for you professionally, or you feel uncomfortable responding, you have the right to refuse to answer any question, or to respond under the condition of confidentiality. At any time, you are free to discontinue participation. Are you comfortable with this and still willing to participate?
3. Talk to me about your daily process as a journalist?
  - a. Schedule
  - b. Process Aspects of Newsgathering
4. How would you characterize your relationship with PIOs?
  - a. Antagonistic interactions
  - b. Symbiotic interactions
5. What factors contributed to this?
  - a. Resources (Pressers, VNR's, Archives Online)
  - b. Access (Official/Expert Sources)
  - c. Practice over time (Personal Experience)
  - d. Honesty
  - e. Cooperation
6. What are some examples of actions of PIOs that helped facilitate your work?
7. What are some examples of actions of PIOs that hindered your ability to do work?
8. What sets a good PIO apart from a bad PIO in your experience?
  - a. Resources
  - b. Experience

- c. Approach
9. What are/were the biggest challenges you are currently coping with (coped with) here?
    - a. Economics
    - b. Staffing
    - c. Workload
    - d. Competition
  10. What impact has the economic downturn in mainstream media had here?
    - a. Reporting
    - b. Editing
    - c. Verification
    - d. Content
    - e. Newsroom
  11. What has the economic downturn done to your working relationship with PIOs?
  12. What do you find you wished you had more time to work on as a journalist?
  13. What were you responsible for in the newsroom?
  14. How has source relationship building changed in the current media environment?
  15. What sources of pressure did your station/paper face?
    - a. Economic
    - b. Political
    - c. Managerial
    - d. Source
    - e. Pragmatic
    - f. Newsroom
  16. Think back, what is different for journalism now from past years?
    - a. Staffing
    - b. Routine Practices
    - c. Values
  17. What kind of influence did the newsroom environment have on your own work?
    - a. Competition between journalists
    - b. Demand for content

- c. Timing of newsgathering
  - d. Output of content
18. How would you alter the media environment given the current context?
19. Did your organization provide enough coverage of local government and politics?

### **Technology**

20. How was your organization utilizing social and digital media?
- a. Staff
  - b. Sourcing
  - c. Dissemination
  - d. Research
21. Did you use social and digital media in your interactions with PIOs?
- a. HARO
  - b. Twitter
  - c. Facebook

### **Context**

22. Thinking about context, what do you think is different about working in the Capitol Bureau?
- a. Standard day in newsroom vs. the Hall and Chambers
  - b. Approach to dealing with PIOs vs. other practitioners
23. What is different in your experience with crisis scenarios and working with PIOs?
- a. Katrina/Rita vs. Gustav/Ike
  - b. Scandals (political and otherwise)
  - c. More broadly
24. What about continuing coverage on a developing issue?
- a. What qualifies now?
  - b. How do you approach it differently than say a spot story?
  - c. Do you find it may be simpler to follow, given the environment here?
25. Tell me about how you think politics influenced your experience with PIOs?
- a. Agencies external of Executive/Legislative office?

- b. What factors help you move past some of those challenges?
  - c. How do political elements shape your thought process in approaching newsgathering and reporting?
- 26. How does the current state-level media relations of this government compare with past governments you've interacted with on the job?
  - a. Collaboration
  - b. Communication
  - c. Accessibility
  - d. Availability
- 27. What do you think about the PIO profession?
  - a. Professionally
  - b. What's good?
  - c. What's bad?
- 28. What role do you think PIOs play?
  - a. Conduit
  - b. Interpreter
  - c. Bridge
- 29. What role do you played in relationship to them?
  - a. Storyteller
  - b. Receiver

## Appendix C: IRB Approval

### Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

**LSU**  
Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
131 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.5983  
irb@lsu.edu  
lsu.edu/irb

– Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-F, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at <http://research.lsu.edu/CompliancePoliciesProcedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard%28IRB%29/Item24737.html>

– A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:

- (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru F.
- (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
- (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.  
\*If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
- (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
- (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>)
- (F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<http://research.lsu.edu/files/item26774.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator: Dr. Jinx C. Broussard Rank: Associate Professor  
Dept: Mass Communication Ph: 225.578.7603 E-mail: jinx@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each  
\*If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

Chris McCollough / Dr. Jinx C. Broussard - Supervising professor  
Graduate Student  
225-454-6047  
cmccol13@tigers.lsu.edu

IRB# E6052 LSU Proposal #

- ☒ Complete Application
- ☒ Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title:

Revisiting Factors that Impact Public Information Officer - Journalist Relationship: Clarification and Updates

Study Exempted By:  
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
Institutional Review Board  
Louisiana State University  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)  
Exemption Expires: 7/27/2015

4) Proposal? (yes or no) ☒ No If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if YES, either ☐ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant  
OR ☐ More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students) Public Information Officers, Journalists

\*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature Jinx C. Broussard Date 7/19/2012 (no per signatures)

\*\* I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted ☒ Not Exempted ☐ Category/Paragraph

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes ☐ No ☒

Reviewer Meghan J. Sanders Signature [Signature]

Date 7/23/12

## Appendix D: Letter of Informed Consent

### Letter of Informed Consent

Study Exempted By:  
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
Institutional Review Board  
Louisiana State University  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
225-578-8892 | www.lsu.edu/irb  
Exemption Expires: 7/22/2015

1. **Study Title:** Revisiting Factors that Impact Public Information Officer–Journalist Relationships: Clarifications and Updates
2. **Performance Site:** Research Subject's Place of Work or by Phone
3. **Investigators:** The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
Mr. Chris McCollough      225-454-6047  
Dr. Jinx C. Broussard      225-578-7603
4. **Purpose of the Study:** The information gathered in this study will be incorporated with other interviews as part of a dissertation that examines these elements and provides a model for both public information officers and journalists that helps overcome challenges and more effectively perform their work in the current practical climate.
5. **Subject Inclusion:** Individuals who work as state government Public Information Officers (PIOs) or as journalists who cover state government.
6. **Number of Subjects:** 58
7. **Study Procedures:** The study consists of qualitative interviewing of both journalists and PIOs. The investigator will utilize interview quotes to perform a qualitative analysis of both PIOs and journalists.
8. **Benefits:** The final product of this study is a portion of a dissertation which analyzes the work relationships between PIOs and journalists, the challenges both professions face, and how both parties are working to overcome these challenges. Participation in this study permits its subjects the opportunity to review their previous contributions, and to provide any clarifications to insure that their perspective on the subject is accurately reflected in finished documents.
9. **Risks:** The only study risk is the potential for inadvertent release of sensitive information about their work environment. However, interviewees have the right to confidentiality in response or to decline to answer any questions that may pose potential risks. In addition, subjects will be consulted on included quotes and anecdotes in the event of academic publication. Finally, all research files will be kept on a secure hard drive which only the researcher will access.

10. **Right to Refuse:** Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may be otherwise entitled. Subjects also have the right to stop the recording at any time or opt out of any questions that pose potential risks to their well-being.

11. **Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but interviewees have the right to ask that their name and identifying characteristics be excluded from data analysis, report of research findings, and that all data records be destroyed at the completion of this study. **Interviewees will be granted confidentiality by signing under the "Request for Confidentiality" section below.** Interviewees may also stop the recording during the interview and speak off-the-record if they wish to impart information to build knowledge without putting it on the record under their name.

**12. Signatures:**

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct any additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb). I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Request for Confidentiality:**

By signing below, I request that the investigator withhold my name and identifying characteristics from records and publication in reporting the findings of this study in any form. I also understand that at the completion of this study, the researcher will destroy all physical data connected with this study.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.6792  
[irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu) | [lsu.edu/irb](http://lsu.edu/irb)

Investigator  
Dr. Jinx C. Broussard  
208 Hodges Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.7603  
F: 225.578.2125

Co-Investigator  
Christopher Jon McCollough  
4515 Alvin Dark Avenue, Apt. 1  
Baton Rouge, LA 70820  
Home Phone: 225.454.6047  
Mobile Phone: 540.850.5082

IRB Approval Number; Expiration:

\_\_\_\_\_




## Appendix E: Signatures of Informed Consent

10. **Right to Refuse:** Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may be otherwise entitled. Subjects also have the right to stop the recording at any time or opt out of any questions that pose potential risks to their well-being.

11. **Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but interviewees have the right to ask that their name and identifying characteristics be excluded from data analysis, report of research findings, and that all data records be destroyed at the completion of this study. Interviewees will be granted confidentiality by signing under the "Request for Confidentiality" section below. Interviewees may also stop the recording during the interview and speak off-the-record if they wish to impart information to build knowledge without putting it on the record under their name.

### 12. Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct any additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb). I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature:  Date: 10/4/12

### 13. Request for Confidentiality:

By signing below, I request that the investigator withhold my name and identifying characteristics from records and publication in reporting the findings of this study in any form. I also understand that at the completion of this study, the researcher will destroy all physical data connected with this study.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.6792  
[irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu) | [lsu.edu/irb](http://lsu.edu/irb)

Investigator  
Dr. Jinx C. Broussard  
208 Hodges Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.7603  
F: 225.578.2125

Co-Investigator  
Christopher Jon McCollough  
4515 Alvin Dark Avenue, Apt. 1  
Baton Rouge, LA 70820  
Home Phone: 225.454.6047  
Mobile Phone: 540.850.5082

IRB Approval Number; Expiration:

\_\_\_\_\_

10. **Right to Refuse:** Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may be otherwise entitled. Subjects also have the right to stop the recording at any time or opt out of any questions that pose potential risks to their well-being.

11. **Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but interviewees have the right to ask that their name and identifying characteristics be excluded from data analysis, report of research findings, and that all data records be destroyed at the completion of this study. Interviewees will be granted confidentiality by signing under the "Request for Confidentiality" section below. Interviewees may also stop the recording during the interview and speak off-the-record if they wish to impart information to build knowledge without putting it on the record under their name.

12. **Signatures:**

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct any additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb). I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature: *Laquita L. Brown* Date: 10.26.12

13. **Request for Confidentiality:**

By signing below, I request that the investigator withhold my name and identifying characteristics from records and publication in reporting the findings of this study in any form. I also understand that at the completion of this study, the researcher will destroy all physical data connected with this study.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
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Home Phone: 225.454.6047  
Mobile Phone: 540.850.5082


IRB Approval Number; Expiration: \_\_\_\_\_

10. **Right to Refuse:** Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may be otherwise entitled. Subjects also have the right to stop the recording at any time or opt out of any questions that pose potential risks to their well-being.

11. **Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but interviewees have the right to ask that their name and identifying characteristics be excluded from data analysis, report of research findings, and that all data records be destroyed at the completion of this study. Interviewees will be granted confidentiality by signing under the "Request for Confidentiality" section below. Interviewees may also stop the recording during the interview and speak off-the-record if they wish to impart information to build knowledge without putting it on the record under their name.

**12. Signatures:**

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Subject Signature:  Date: 9-10-12

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Investigator  
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P: 225.578.7603  
F: 225.578.2125

Co-Investigator  
Christopher Jon McCollough  
4515 Alvin Dark Avenue, Apt. 1  
Baton Rouge, LA 70820  
Home Phone: 225.454.6047  
Mobile Phone: 540.850.5082

IRB Approval Number; Expiration: \_\_\_\_\_

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Subject Signature: Robert C. Mathews Date: 10-18-12

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Subject Signature: Robert C. Mathews Date: 10-18-12

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Subject Signature: Blaine Tidwell Date: 9-14-2012

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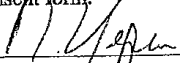
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Subject Signature:  Date: 9-20-12

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Subject Signature: [Signature] Date: 9/18/12

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Subject Signature: Grant Schultz Date: 10/5/12

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Review Board	Investigator	Co-Investigator
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair	Dr. Jinx C. Broussard	Christopher Jon McCollough
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall	208 Hodges Hall	4515 Alvin Dark Avenue, Apt. 1
Baton Rouge, LA 70803	Baton Rouge, LA 70803	Baton Rouge, LA 70820
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Subject Signature: Shane Hall Date: 10/24/12

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: Oct. 15, 2012

**13. Request for Confidentiality:**

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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F: 225.578.2125

Co-Investigator  
Christopher Jon McCollough  
4515 Alvin Dark Avenue, Apt. 1  
Baton Rouge, LA 70820  
Home Phone: 225.454.6047  
Mobile Phone: 540.850.5082

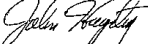
IRB Approval Number; Expiration: \_\_\_\_\_

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Subject Signature:  Date: 9/17/2012

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IRB Approval Number; Expiration:

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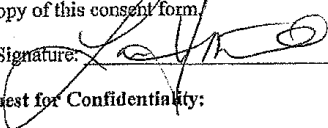


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Subject Signature:  Date: 9-24-12

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

9-13-2012

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Subject Signature: Marsha Dhulew Date: 9-13-12

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Subject Signature: Sue Danielson Date: 9/26/12

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Subject Signature: Sue Danielson Date: 9/26/12

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Subject Signature: [Signature] Date: 9/28/12

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Subject Signature: N/A Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Subject Signature: Rebecca Gettings Date: 9-21-12

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Subject Signature: Rebecca Gettings Date: 9-21-12

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Subject Signature:  Date: 9/28/12

13. **Request for Confidentiality:**

*Peter Frost*

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Subject Signature:  Date: 9/27/12

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Subject Signature: MAAOKES Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 10/11/12

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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F: 225.578.2125

Co-Investigator  
Christopher Jon McCollough  
4515 Alvin Dark Avenue, Apt. 1  
Baton Rouge, LA 70820  
Home Phone: 225.454.6047  
Mobile Phone: 540.850.5082

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Subject Signature: Micelle Melhoffer Date: 9-19-12

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Review Board	Investigator	Co-Investigator
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Baton Rouge, LA 70803	Baton Rouge, LA 70803	Baton Rouge, LA 70820
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F: 225.578.6792	F: 225.578.2125	Mobile Phone: 540.850.5082
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Subject Signature:  Date: 9-28-12

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Subject Signature: Richard Jones Date: 10-13-12

**13. Request for Confidentiality:**

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Subject Signature: Melinda DeStatt Date: 9/18/12

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Subject Signature: Debra J. Green Date: 9/21/12

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Subject Signature: Jeff J. Pina Date: 9/21/12

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Subject Signature: Jeff J. Pina Date: 9/21/12

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 21 September 2012

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Home Phone: 225.434.6042  
Mobile Phone: 540.830.3083

IRB Approval Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration: \_\_\_\_\_

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Subject Signature:  Date: 25 Sept 12

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Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Review Board	Investigator	Co-Investigator
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Subject Signature: William P. Hayden Date: 9/11/2012

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Subject Signature: Robert P. Brannon Date: Sept 11, 2012

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Subject Signature:  Date: 9/11/12

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F: 225.578.2125

Co-Investigator  
Christopher Jon McCollough  
4515 Alvin Dark Avenue, Apt. 1  
Baton Rouge, LA 70820  
Home Phone: 225.454.6047  
Mobile Phone: 540.850.5082

IRB Approval Number; Expiration:

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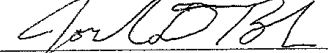
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Subject Signature:  Date: 10/11/12

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Subject Signature:  Date: 9/13/12

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Subject Signature: Meg Carter Date: 9/10/12

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Subject Signature:  Date: 9-12-2012

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Subject Signature: JAMES BERRY Date: 9/22/12

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Subject Signature: Michael C. Love Date: Oct. 10, 2012

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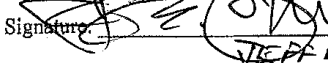
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Subject Signature:  Date: 11 OCTOBER 2012  
JEFF E. SCHAPIRO

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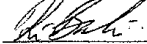


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Subject Signature:  Date: 9/14/12

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Subject Signature: James Lynch Date: 9-26-12

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IRB Approval Number; Expiration: \_\_\_\_\_

10. **Right to Refuse:** Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may be otherwise entitled. Subjects also have the right to stop the recording at any time or opt out of any questions that pose potential risks to their well-being.

11. **Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but interviewees have the right to ask that their name and identifying characteristics be excluded from data analysis, report of research findings, and that all data records be destroyed at the completion of this study. Interviewees will be granted confidentiality by signing under the "Request for Confidentiality" section below. Interviewees may also stop the recording during the interview and speak off-the-record if they wish to impart information to build knowledge without putting it on the record under their name.

12. **Signatures:**

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct any additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb). I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

13. **Request for Confidentiality:**

By signing below, I request that the investigator withhold my name and identifying characteristics from records and publication in reporting the findings of this study in any form. I also understand that at the completion of this study, the researcher will destroy all physical data connected with this study.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
203 B-J David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.6792  
[irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu) | [lsu.edu/irb](http://lsu.edu/irb)

Investigator  
Dr. Jinx C. Broussard  
208 Hodges Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.7603  
P: 225.578.2125

Co-Investigator  
Christopher Jon McCollough  
4515 Alvin Dark Avenue, Apt. 1  
Baton Rouge, LA 70820  
Home Phone: 225.454.6047  
Mobile Phone: 540.850.5082

IRB Approval Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration: \_\_\_\_\_

10. **Right to Refuse:** Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may be otherwise entitled. Subjects also have the right to stop the recording at any time or opt out of any questions that pose potential risks to their well-being.

11. **Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but interviewees have the right to ask that their name and identifying characteristics be excluded from data analysis, report of research findings, and that all data records be destroyed at the completion of this study. **Interviewees will be granted confidentiality by signing under the "Request for Confidentiality" section below.** Interviewees may also stop the recording during the interview and speak off-the-record if they wish to impart information to build knowledge without putting it on the record under their name.

**12. Signatures:**

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct any additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb). I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature: Rene P. Jean Date: 10/18/2012

**13. Request for Confidentiality:**

By signing below, I request that the investigator withhold my name and identifying characteristics from records and publication in reporting the findings of this study in any form. I also understand that at the completion of this study, the researcher will destroy all physical data connected with this study.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Review Board  
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203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
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Mobile Phone: 540.850.5082

IRB Approval Number; Expiration:

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10. **Right to Refuse:** Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they are entitled by observation protocol. Subjects also have the right to stop the recording at any time or opt out of any questions that pose potential risk to their well-being.

11. **Privacy:** Results of the study may be published. Our interview team has the right to use their names and identifying characteristics be excluded from data that will appear in research findings and that all data records be destroyed at the completion of this study. Interviewees will be granted confidentiality by signing under the "Request for Confidentiality" section below. Interviewees may also stop the recording during the interview and speak off the record if they wish to impart information to build knowledge without putting it on the record under their name.

12. **Signatures:**

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct any additional questions regarding study procedures to the investigators. I do have questions about subject's rights or other concerns. I can contact Robert C. Mahoney, Institutional Review Board (225) 578-1692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature: [Signature] Date: 10/19/2012

13. **Request for Confidentiality:**

By signing below, I request that the investigator withhold my name and identifying characteristics from records and publications in reporting the findings of this study in any form. I also understand that at the completion of this study, the researcher will destroy all physical data connected with this study.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Review Board Dr. Robert Mahoney, Chair 2013 Boyd Hall Baton Rouge, LA 70803 P: 225-578-1692 F: 225-578-2195 Email: <a href="mailto:rcmahone@lsu.edu">rcmahone@lsu.edu</a>	Investigator Dr. Jinn C. Broussard 208 Hodges Hall Baton Rouge, LA 70803 P: 225-578-7603 F: 225-578-2195 Mobile phone: 340-650-9082	Co-Investigator Christopher Jon McCollough 4515 Aviva Park Avenue, Apt. 1 Baton Rouge, LA 70820 Home phone: 225-454-6047 Mobile phone: 340-650-9082
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LSU / Jinn C. Broussard, PhD, IRB Chair

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The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct any additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb). I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature:  Date: 10-12-12

**13. Request for Confidentiality:**

By signing below, I request that the investigator withhold my name and identifying characteristics from records and publication in reporting the findings of this study in any form. I also understand that at the completion of this study, the researcher will destroy all physical data connected with this study.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Review Board  
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## **Vita**

Christopher Jon McCollough was born in Sacramento, California, but grew up in Stafford, Virginia. As a student at Brooke Point High School, Chris developed a passion for history, government, and politics. It was through his interdisciplinary education in communication at Virginia Tech University that Chris became fascinated with the working relationships between PIOs and journalists, political communication, and public sector communication. He earned a bachelor's degree in communication at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Virginia. He also cultivated his appreciation for community service in his active participation in Virginia Tech's civilian marching band, The Marching Virginians. He continued his education at Virginia Tech University and earned his master's degree in communication and collegiate pedagogy. Chris also taught in the Stafford County School system, as well as a teaching assistant in 12 sections of public speaking, developing his love of teaching.

Upon arriving in Baton Rouge, Chris continued to work in education and public service. While studying in the Manship School of Mass Communication, Chris helped Dr. David Kurpius plan, implement, and run the first Louisiana High School Journalism Institute. Chris also served as a research assistant to Dr. David Kurpius, as well as teaching a section of media writing and media ethics. Chris also taught in the East Baton Rouge Parish school system.

Chris is now an Assistant Professor in the Communication Department at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia. He currently teaches public relations and public speaking courses at the undergraduate level. He is also collaborating with his new colleagues on the Non-Profit and Civic Engagement (NPACE) Center, which seeks to connect students in public relations and mass communication with local nonprofit organizations and businesses in need of publicity, promotion, and other public communication campaign work.